FACE TO FACE WITH OBI-WAN KENOBI

EWAN McGREGOR TALKS ABOUT THE NEXT STAR WARS

CINESCAPE

ACTION/ADVENTURE/SCIENCE FICTION • MOVIES/TELEVISION/NEW MEDIA

THE TOP 10 SCI-FI TV EPISODES OF ALL TIME

TOMORROW NEVER DIES

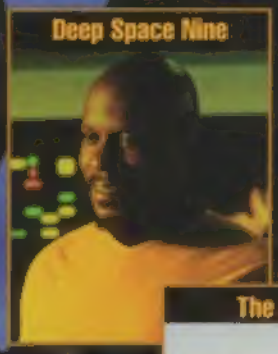
James Bond Takes on the Media

HOT ROCKS

Armageddon and Deep Impact Collide

SPECIAL DELIVERY

Kevin Costner Returns to a Dark Future



Plus:

25 MOVIE PREVIEWS

Godzilla, Star Trek 9, Lost In Space, Matrix, Star Wars, Spider-Man, Terminator 3 and more

$4.99 U.S./$6.50 Canada

January/February 1998

02

0 70989 37358 7

TREK © PARAMOUNT. BS © Warner Bros. X-Files © Fox Broadcasting. McGregor © Miramax

TM & © 1997 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. Used under authorization by Decipher Inc. TM, ® & © 1997 Decipher Inc., P.O. Box 56, Norfolk, VA 23501. All Rights Reserved.

He never knew his father.

His mother works two jobs.

His brother's going to prison.

He's going to college.

Some kids make it no matter how tough the odds. Years of research and we discovered what he already knew. Kids are amazingly resilient. Find their strengths. Nurture them. And kids can overcome. Even thrive. It's the idea behind *Youth Power*™. More than a drug prevention program. A life enhancement program. Academic achievement. Life skills. Community service. Suddenly, kids have the power. To live without drugs. And go places. Even when you'd bet they weren't going anywhere. Call 1.800.258.2766 or write "Just Say No" International, 2101 Webster Street, Suite 1300, Oakland, CA 94612

YOUTH/POWER™

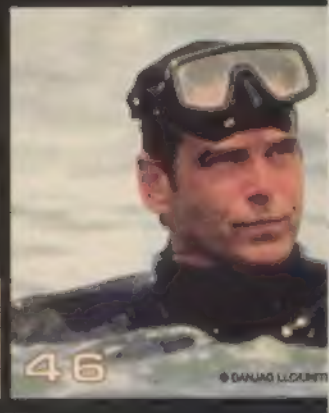
A PROGRAM OF just say no INTERNATIONAL

I N

32

22

58



46

20 CYBER PUNK

Keanu Reeves sets out on another excellent adventure, this time battling evil mind-controlling computers in the Wachowski brothers' futuristic *noir* thriller *Matrix*.

22 A LIFE EXTRAORDINARY

For Scottish supernova Ewan McGregor, the Hollywood fast track means going on *Nightwatch* and returning as a Jedi.

26 METEOR SHOWER

The similarly themed *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* hurtle toward a smash-up on the big-screen.

32 COOL WORLDS

CINESCAPE explores the science-fiction universe in search of the 10 coolest TV episodes ever aired.

46 HOSTILE TAKEOVER

A megalomaniacal media baron sets his sights on world domination in the latest James Bond epic.

52 SPECIAL DELIVERY

Will *The Postman* return the post-apocalyptic subgenre to the top of the box office? Kevin Costner—and Hollywood—are counting on it.

58 DIGITAL DUEL

DVD and DIVX prepare to duke it out for home entertainment supremacy. Can old-fashioned VHS hope to compete?

DEPARTMENTS

LETTERS
8 Is *Star Trek: Voyager* worth the trip?

NEWS
10 Science-fiction novels warp from the shelves to the screen.

RUSHES
16 Minnie Driver gets carried away by *Hard Rain*; Michael Ironside bugs out in *Starship Troopers*.

MOVIES
64 What's in a name? For the *Star Wars* prequels, plenty.

VIDEO
70 Robert Zemeckis' *Contact* fails to connect.

TELEVISION
76 A science-fiction legend's legacy continues on *Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict*.

INTERTAINMENT
78 Superheroes finally blast into the computer game kingdom.

BOOKS
80 Superfan Forrest J Ackerman offers a nostalgic look back at his half-century obsession with science fiction.

CINESC

FROM THE EDITOR

I must thank Jane Hamsher. By giving the lowdown on her showbiz cronies—people she calls "some of the meanest, greediest, low-blowing motherfuckers in Hollywood"—the *Natural Born Killers* producer and tell-all author has made me, a California native, happy to be sitting here in the midst of a Chicago winter, wrapped up in more clothes than made up my entire wardrobe during the first 20 years of my life.

Hamsher's story of drugs, booze and pneumatic egos is the kind of noirish Los Angeles corruption saga I grew up with, inevitably leading me down Interstate 5 after high school to the University of Southern California, where Hamsher was a student. Jane was on her way out of USC as I was on my way in, but I knew the type. I saw them storming through the Marcia Lucas Building at all hours, long hair cascading behind them like a trail of smoke, eyes set in amber, cheekbones cut harshly into their faces. Off to the Trojan Barrel Bar to wash the bile from their mouths, or, better yet, to the Dental School patio for some last-minute location shooting before the equipment had to go back in lockup.

The film school has never been about mere coursework. Moviemaking is a high-pressure requirement at USC that can literally launch (or stall out) careers. But it's obviously nothing compared to the madness of working for NYU grad Oliver Stone. In her endlessly entertaining book, *Killer Instinct*, Hamsher admits to taking psychedelics with Stone during location scouting for *NBK*—and you can hardly blame her. Even a bad acid trip would seem like harmless fun when the alternative is dealing with the "imposing, intimidating sonofabitch" that Hamsher describes Stone to be.

But hey, maybe that's what it takes to be a filmmaker. One semester, I shared a class with John Singleton, who was in the midst of making a student film called *Boys N the Hood*. He would strut into class about 15 minutes late each day looking like he'd been squeezed in a vise—eyes bulging, fists clenched, head rolling between heavy shoulders, daring anyone to say something about the perpetual tardiness. The instructor, one of those oldtimers who liked to pretend he'd been a victim of the Hollywood Blacklist, would stop mid-sentence and purse his lips like he was tasting some exotic food. He wisely chose to say nothing.

So maybe it really is best to be out here in the Midwest, sitting comfortably amid the corn-fed attorneys and accountants of the City of Broad Shoulders. Sure, you'll find mean, greedy, low-blowing motherfuckers in the Heartland, too. But it's pretty easy to ignore them. After all, they don't look as good, and nobody writes books about them.—*Douglas Perry*

JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 1996
VOLUME 3, NUMBER 12

PUBLISHER
Steve Harris

EDITOR
Douglas Perry
MANAGING EDITOR
Steve Hockensmith
SENIOR EDITOR
Edward Gross
WEST COAST EDITOR
Beth Laski
ASSISTANT EDITORS
Gina McIntyre
Annabelle Villanueva

ART DIRECTOR
Mike Smith
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR
Brian Trost
ASSOCIATE DESIGNERS
Kim Thornton, Brad Mosher

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Mark A. Altman, Marc Camron, Frank Kurtz, Frieda Noone, Cindy Pearlman
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Jack Copley

MVP MEDIA GROUP™
Steve Harris, President
Mark Kaminsky, Vice President/General Counsel
Douglas Perry, Director of Operations/Editorial Director
Val Russell, Circulation Director
Peter Walsh, Marketing Director
LindaSue Smith, Controller
Mike Smith, Design Director
Pat Sandberg, Systems Manager
Lori Gignac, Office Manager
John Stanford, Manufacturing Director—Stanford Consulting, Inc.

ADVERTISING
Eisenberg Communications Group, Inc. (818) 712-9800
Jeffrey Eisenberg, National Advertising Director
Eric DeRose, Account Executive
Elaine Zimmerman, Operations Manager

DISTRIBUTED BY:
WARNER PUBLISHER SERVICES, INC.

For customer service inquiries, change of address, missing issues or subscription concerns, please contact *CINESCAPE*, P.O. Box 605, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0605, or call (800) 342-3592.

CINESCAPE (ISSN# 1077-3363) is published bi-monthly, along with three special double issues per year, by MVP Entertainment, Inc., 1920 Highland Ave., Suite 220, Lombard, IL 60148. Periodical Postage paid at Lombard, IL and additional mailing offices. Single issue rate: $4.99. Subscription rates for U.S.: $29.95, Canada and Mexico: $36.95, and all others: $75.00. **POSTMASTER:** Send change of address to: *CINESCAPE*, Customer Service, P.O. Box 605, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0605. The publishers are not responsible for unsolicited materials. Without limiting the rights under copyrights reserved herein, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written notice of MVP Entertainment, Inc. Copyright © 1997, MVP Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved. TM and © for theatrical and television series and the characters contained therein are owned by the respective trademark and copyright holders. All materials listed in this magazine are subject to manufacturer's change and publishers assume no responsibility for such changes. *CINESCAPE* is a registered trademark of MVP Entertainment, Inc. MVP Media Group is a servicemark of MVP Media, Inc.

Printed in the USA

Celebrate with a NEW SERIES...

STAR TREK: 30 YEARS
LIMITED EDITION CHECKS

FIRST TIME EVER - all four STAR TREK™ programs in one dynamic check series!

Explore the possibilities - Share in the celebration - Discover where all Star Trek enthusiasts are going - to The Anthony Grandio Company!

Never before in a STAR TREK check package!

- 4 rotating scenes, a check for each series - 30 Years of STAR TREK history!
- Gold foil Official STAR TREK: 30 YEARS logo and Celebration message on each check.
- Official STAR TREK: 30 YEARS logo on the back.
- Your name and address in Official STAR TREK Crillee type font.
- Federation security features for fraud protection.

- Our Gift: STAR TREK: 30 YEARS Limited Edition checkbook cover - with gold foil logo!
- Commemorative set available for the collector or those without checking accounts.
- A Stellar Gift Idea: Our gift certificates for your family and friends.

*with ST: 30 YEARS Check purchase - also sold separately

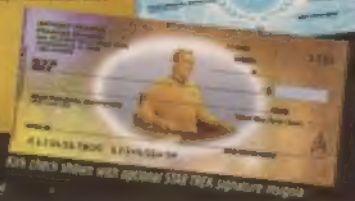
ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE ANTHONY GRANDIO COMPANY...

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION - 8 existing scenes. The biggest STAR TREK series ever!

Cover included with order - also sold separately.

STAR TREK CLASSIC - 5 scenes, includes Federation Seal or UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS - 1 scene, Federation Seal

Cover included with order - also sold separately.



Kirk check shown with optional STAR TREK signature insignia

Picard check shown with optional STAR TREK lettering and insignia

These STAR TREK checks are accepted by banks throughout the galaxy but are only available in this solar system from The Anthony Grandio Company.

Send for your STAR TREK checks and gift certificates today... because this offer will only orbit for a limited time!

Instructions: To ensure correct bank codes, please follow these instructions carefully.

1. Send a reorder form or voided check from your existing check supply. Indicate any printing changes.
2. Also send a deposit slip from your existing check supply.
3. Complete and include the order form.
4. Enclose a check payable to *The Anthony Grandio Company*.

Allow four weeks from receipt of order for regular delivery. Checks will be mailed to the address printed on your checks.

Mail to:
The Anthony Grandio Company
P.O. Box 23098
Jacksonville, FL 32241-3098

To order gift certificates and commemorative sets, call 1-800-472-6346.

Satisfaction Guaranteed.

TM & © 1998 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. STAR TREK and Related Marks are Trademarks of Paramount Pictures. The Anthony Grandio Company Authorized User.

Yes! I Want STAR TREK Checks!

YCIN41

Name _____

Daytime phone # (____) _____ Start my checks at number _____
(If no number is provided we will start with 1001)

STAR TREK CHECKS (please mark style(s) & quantity)

- ❑ STAR TREK CLASSIC
- ❑ UNITED FEDERATION of PLANETS
- ❑ STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

Quantity	One-Part ($20 per box)	Duplicate ($30 per box)
1 Box	❑ $14.95	❑ $16.95
2 Boxes	❑ $29.90	❑ $33.90
4 Boxes	❑ $54.00 Best Buy!	❑ $62.00 Best Buy!

STAR TREK LIMITED EDITION CHECKS (please indicate quantity & total)

❑ STAR TREK: 30 YEARS LIMITED EDITION

# of Boxes		Total
	One-Part ($20 per box) x $19.95 =	$
	Duplicate ($30 per box) x $21.95 =	$

STAR TREK CHECKBOOK COVERS (please complete if ordering additional covers)

USS Enterprise NCC-1701 Cover (STAR TREK CLASSIC cover)
# of Covers _____ X $4.95 = _____

USS Enterprise NCC-1701D Cover (STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION cover)
# of Covers _____ X $4.95 = _____

STAR TREK: 30 YEARS LTD ED Cover
# of Covers _____ X $6.95 = _____

Please enter prices from charts at left

Checks (make sure style & qty. are marked on chart)	
Additional Covers (fill out chart at left)	
Matching STAR TREK lettering - $2.50 (complimentary with ST: 30 YEARS LTD ED Checks)	
STAR TREK Signature Insignia -$2.95 (not available for ST: 30 YEARS LTD ED Checks)	
For ST: CLASSIC & FEDERATION Checks: ❑ Command ❑ Science ❑ Engineering (Choose one - Command insignia shown in Kirk check above)	
For ST: THE NEXT GENERATION Checks: ❑ (One insignia only - insignia shown in Picard check above)	
FL sales tax (add 6.5%)	
Shipping & Handling	1.25
For Priority Mail add $3.75	
TOTAL	

The Anthony Grandio Company is proud to be part of the Star Trek 30th Anniversary Celebration!

TREK'S FUTURE

I loved your September/October issue, especially the comments by Steve Hockensmith on the problems with *Star Trek: Voyager* ("*Star Trek: Minnow?*"). I think you should do an entire special issue on *Star Trek* that closely examines both the current problems and the untapped potential of the franchise. An issue that suggests possible future *Star Trek* series or movies (the same way you did a couple of years ago with the *Star Wars* movies) would be nice.

Actually, the future of *Star Trek* is kind of bleak, and *Star Trek: Voyager* continues to pound nails in its coffin. Michael Piller's *Star Trek 9* will probably finish it off with a dismal box office performance, which, in my view, is almost a given. The movie will have no hook to draw in viewers. No Borg, no first-ever movie for the *Next Generation* crew, no final original cast movie, no death of Spock, nothing of any kind to grab fans' attention. The last *Star Trek* movie without a hook was *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, and look at how well it did!

Incidentally, you guys have really fallen behind. By this time in 1995, you already had published the news that the Borg would be featured in *Star Trek 8*. Come on, guys. Call in some favors and get some information.
DAYTON KITCHENS
GREENWOOD, AR

I just received your magazine (November/December) and the cover shot of Jeri Ryan looks totally fabulous. She is the hottest actress to appear in a sci-fi magazine. She is wonderful, gorgeous and sexy—just right for *Voyager*. I hope she never leaves the show.
GARY GRIFFITH
NEWARK, NJ

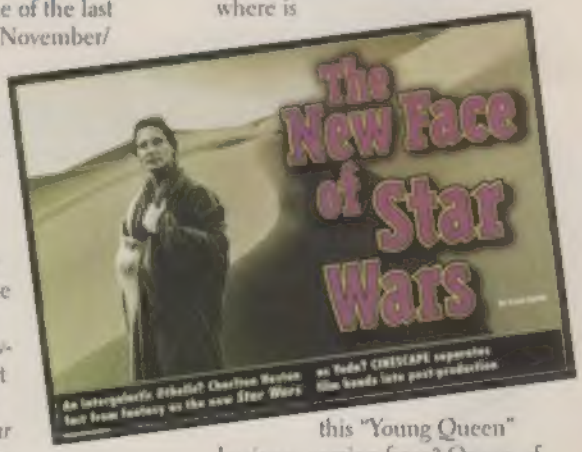
A NEW HOPE

The cover alone of the last *CINESCAPE* (November/December) was enough to get me to purchase the issue. Being a *Star Wars* fan, I enjoyed your coverage of the next trilogy. The pictures and information covered the subject better than the most recent *Star Wars Insider* fan club magazine.

I can't wait to see the prequel film. I know it sounds similar to the first *Star Wars* movie, but with good actors, CGI technology and George Lucas' direction, it should reward the filmgoer with an excellent film. This film will also be an event—a marketing bonanza. But unlike the second *Jurassic Park* film, this event will surely live up to its hype.
RYAN POMINVILLE
HUDSON, WI

As a long time fan of the trilogy, I enjoyed your article "The New Face of *Star Wars*." After being, well, a little obsessed with the *Star Wars* universe for the past 20 years, I feel rather proprietary toward the subject, as I imagine many other fans do. As ridiculous as it seems, it feels like my *Star Wars*.

Will we all be able to relax enough to enjoy what Lucas chooses to tell this time around? With the casting decisions made so far, it sure seems like George is on the right track. (I had imagined the horror of Brad Pitt as a young Obi-Wan.) I feel that Luc Besson would be a dream as director. And what a wonderful decision to cast the talented Natalie Portman! I really enjoy her work, and she has just the right edge for the role. [But] where is



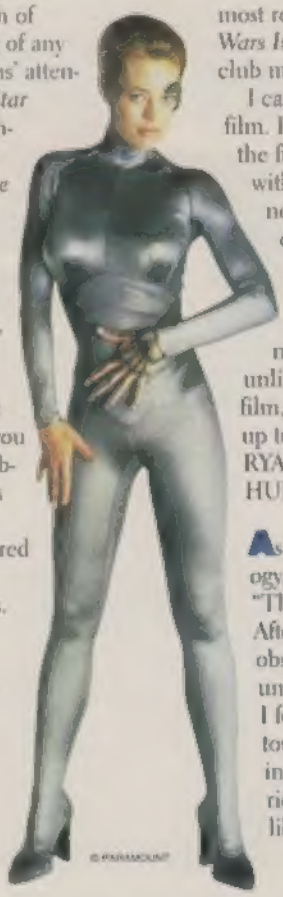
this "Young Queen" business coming from? Queen of what? I had always imagined that *Princess* Leia was called Princess because her adopted father, Bail Organa, was Viceroy of Alderaan. And if the title is bestowed because of "Lord" Vader, wouldn't she be the "Young Lady," or something?
SUSAN AMBERT
GREENVILLE, NC

WHERE'S HIGHLANDER?

I'm trying to figure out why you never have any articles on the *Highlander* TV series. You cover the *Highlander* movies enough.

I really like the magazine, but it seems that if it's not *Star Trek* or *Babylon 5*, it's not news. Well, guess what. If *Highlander* is in its sixth season, there's got to be some fans out there somewhere!

Wouldn't that be news in itself?
JAMES PUCKETT
TULSA, OK



CINESCAPE
welcomes letters from its readers.

Please write to:
CINESCAPE
1920 Highland Avenue
Suite 220
Lombard, IL 60148
or e-mail to:
cinewrite@aol.com

DUNE
The sleeper has awakened!
DUNE: Eye of the Storm™ is available now everywhere great games are sold!
For Information Call: 1-888-457-4647 • www.frpg.com
LAST UNICORN GAMES
FIVE RINGS

DUNE TM & © 1965 Herbert Limited Partnership. All rights reserved.
Dune © 1984 Dino DeLaurentiis Corporation.
Licensed by Universal Studios Licensing, Inc. All rights reserved.
© 1997 Last Unicorn Games, Inc.

Novel Ideas

Hollywood's hitting the books to find future blockbusters

When even Batman and Robin can't pull a blockbuster out of their bat-belts, maybe it's time to rethink the films-inspired-by-comic-books genre. And with the movie rights to *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek*, *Mission: Impossible*, *The Fugitive* and even *The Mod Squad* already spoken for, there's not much left for a hit-hungry movie producer to scavenge from the desolate plains of the vast TV wasteland.

What's Hollywood to do now that the pop culture catalogue has been nearly exhausted? Just in time, studio executives have rediscovered a virtually bottomless reservoir of potential movie blockbusters: the neighborhood library.

A swarm of science-fiction novels is stampeding toward the cineplexes like a horde of ravenous alien bugs. The mini-boom that began with Carl Sagan's *Contact* and Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* is anything but waning. Barry Levinson's adaptation of the Michael Crichton novel *Sphere* is scheduled for a February release. Also on the docket for '98: *Deep Impact*, which was partially inspired by Arthur C. Clarke's *The Hammer of God*, and a Mel Gibson version of Ray Bradbury's classic *Fahrenheit 451*. And waiting in the studio wings are adaptations of Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*, Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* and *Fantastic Voyage*, Patricia Anthony's *Brother Termite* and Larry Niven's *Ringworld*.

"Producers are realizing there's this giant gold mine of

Destination Movies

Several SF writers have taken a crack at writing for the movies. Robert Heinlein tinkered with *Destination Moon*, Ray Bradbury co-wrote a *Moby Dick* script with director John Huston and Harlan Ellison worked on the 1966 melodrama *The Oscar*.

untapped classics of science fiction," explains author Kevin J. Anderson, whose novel *Ignition* (with Doug Beason) is being eyed for the big screen. By going to classic science-fiction novels, books that have stood the test of time, they're already starting with an advantage. They've got something that's established and [has] a good story. From that point they can throw all their wizardry into it.

According to Anderson, it's that special-effects wizardry—and the need to find bigger and better excuses to use it—that's driving producers to the book shelves.

With today's special effects technology there's really nothing that you can't do. For a long time people avoided the science-fiction classics because they just didn't think they could afford to do them right, and now that's really not an issue," Anderson says. "Like *Starship Troopers*, you look at those CGI bugs and you just go 'Wow! That is cool!'"

Ed Neumeier, who penned the script for the wow-laden *Starship Troopers*, agrees with Anderson's take on the trend. "Science fiction is showing real legs right now [thanks in part to] the steady explosion of CGI following *Jurassic Park*. Things that you couldn't have done in a production are now imaginable," Neumeier says. "We can do a lot more than we could 10 years ago, so now the audience *expects* [amazing FX]."

But even though digital technology has made it easier to bring the futuristic sights and sounds of SF to the screen, it's still easy to mess up other key elements of a good book—namely plot, characterization and dialogue.

When I was writing the *Starship Troopers* script, I thought, 'Oh Jesus, there are people who really love this book and I don't want to piss them off,'" Neumeier admits. "But I've learned as a writer that you have to put the book aside at a certain point because narratively it's a different way of looking at things. When you're reading a book, you're creating a movie in your mind. When you're watching a movie, you're seeing what people have chosen to show you. It's more reactive."

Though Neumeier—who was a Heinlein fan as a teen—tried to do the original justice, not all Hollywood scribes care about honoring the work they've been paid to adapt. Just ask Harry Harrison about *Soylent Green* or Stephen King about *The Lawnmower Man*.

"The first six drafts bore no resemblance at all to the book and reversed every moral point I was trying to make," groans Orson Scott Card of early efforts to adapt his novel *Ender's Game*. Though he says he's pleased with how the film version turned out, he acknowledges that he's one of the lucky ones who've seen their big-screen adaptations.

When Hollywood is good, it's magnificent," Card says. "When it's bad, it's bloody awful."

By the Book

Science-fiction novels aren't the only books filling up Hollywood's library card. Crime novelist Elmore Leonard has supplanted Stephen King and John Grisham as tinseltown's favorite scribe.

Men in Black director Barry Sonnenfeld kicked off the cinematic crime wave with his adaptation of Leonard's comic novel *Get Shorty*. The movie's success has led to a slew of Leonard-based movies in development.

Earlier this year, an adaptation of Leonard's satiric *Touch* blew in and out of theaters in a matter of weeks. Helmed by *American Gigolo* writer/director Paul Schrader, it featured Bridget Fonda, Christopher Walken, Skeet Ulrich and Janeane Garofalo. Despite the high-quality cast, the plot—about a monk with the ability to perform miracles—didn't provide the typical Leonard-esque elements: quirky criminals, tangled schemes and off-beat humor.

Miramax has much higher hopes for the next Leonard film to hit the screens, Quentin Tarantino's long-awaited *Jackie Brown*. Tarantino's take on Leonard adapts the novel *Rum Punch* with the help of Samuel L. Jackson, Bridget Fonda, Michael Keaton and Robert De Niro.

Another high-profile adaptation is on the way from cool [illegible] videotape auteur Steven Soderbergh, who's directing a version of the bestselling novel *Out of Sight*. The script was penned by *Get Shorty* screenwriter Scott Frank, and the film began shooting in Los Angeles and Detroit in the fall. Another big-name cast signed on for this project, including George Clooney, Jennifer Lopez, Ving Rhames, Albert Brooks and *Get Shorty* hood Dennis Farina. The movie will feature Lopez as a parole officer who falls in love with a convict (Clooney) after she holds her hostage during a prison escape. Later, she joins the manhunt tracking him down.

The small screen has been overflowing with Leonard adaptations, too. Peter Weller directed the thriller *Gold Coast* for Showtime. Director Jim McBride served up a Leonard-based movie for the cable network called *Pronto*. And Turner Network Television even produced a version of a Leonard Western: *Last Stand at Saber River*.

Hollywood Shuffle

Look, up in the sky! It's a bird. It's a plane. It's "Zorro"?

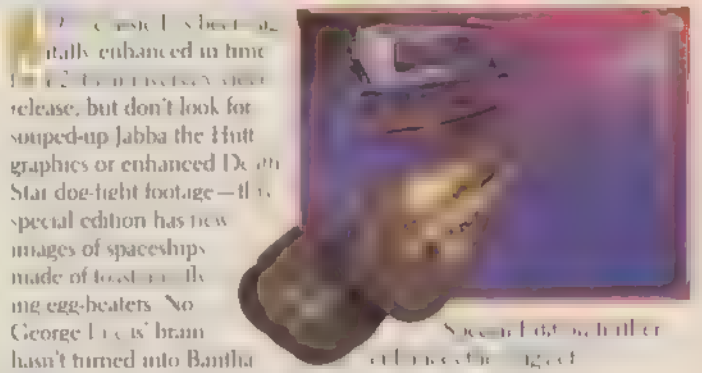
It looks like the man in black will be replacing the Man of Steel on the big screen next summer. The Tim Burton helmed Superman project has been pushed back from its original summer '98 release date. Nicolas Cage will be flying over the Daily Planet Building in the summer of '99 at the earliest.

Swooping in to fill the caped hero void is *The Mask of Zorro* which has been pushed back from its March release date to a late June or early July slot.

Zorro, a Mexican crimefighter in the Lone Ranger mold, was the subject of popular films in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. Though the sword-wielding vigilante is largely unknown to today's audiences, Tri-Star Pictures thinks the Antonio Banderas vehicle will gallop all the way to the bank. A $13 million Super Bowl spot will kick off the movie's advertising campaign. The blockbusters of summers past—1996's *Independence Day* and last year's *Men In Black*—were launched the exact same way. ◆

The Satire Strikes Back

[illegible] digitally enhanced in time for [illegible] release, but don't look for souped-up Jabba the Hutt graphics or enhanced Death Star dog-fight footage—the special edition has new images of spaceships made of toasters, blending egg-beaters. No George Lucas' brain hasn't turned into Bantha fodder. We're talking about that *other* legendary space opera, *Hardware Wars*. By skewering *Star Wars* with cheesy special effects and characters like Ham Salad and Auggie Ben" Doggie, the 20-minute parody became one of the highest grossing short films ever. Now the *Hardware Wars* [illegible]



[illegible] Lucas's trilogy [illegible] rebellion and household appliances." "When Lucas announced he was going to re-release *Star Wars* and the other films, I decided to do the same thing," *Hardware Wars* producer Michael Wiese says. More than 20 new digital effects were added to the short film. But don't look for hints about *Hardware Wars* Episode One—Wiese says there are no plans for a prequel. ◆

The Rights Stuff

It might sound like an unlikely team-up, but the Terminator and James Bond are fighting the same battle—both are the subjects of legal wrangling between producers eager to bring them back to the screen for more sequels.

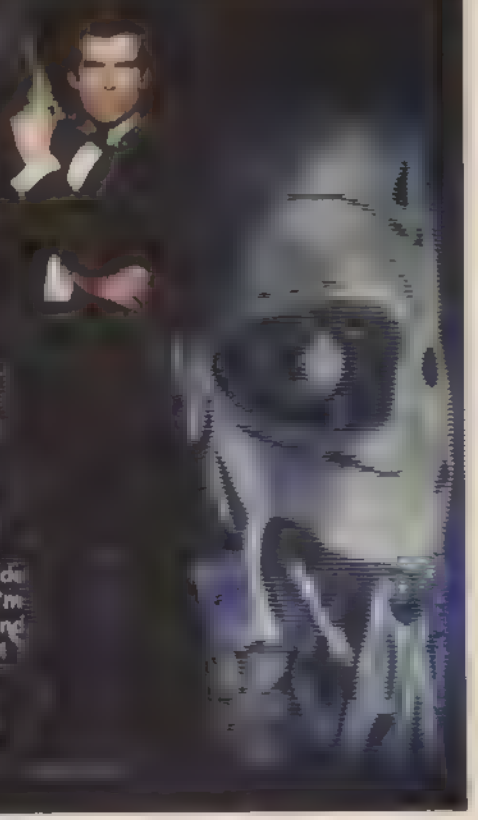
The rights to the lucrative *Terminator* series hit the market this summer when the owner, Carolco Pictures, filed for bankruptcy. Basically the hot-ticket item at a multimillion-dollar estate sale, the rights quickly became the subject of a bidding war between former Carolco co-chairman Andy Vajna and producer Gale Anne Hurd. Vajna won with an $8 million bid.

Still, a third outing is anything but certain. Vajna is searching for a script, studio, director and stars for the film. So far, *Terminator* and *T2* director James Cameron swears he'll have nothing to do with a third movie; Schwarzenegger says he won't be back without Cameron; and Linda Hamilton, who recently wed Cameron, would probably refuse to do another sequel.

Even more uncertain is the fate of Columbia Pictures' planned line of James Bond films, which would directly compete with MGM/UA's long-running franchise. Columbia has partnered with producer Kevin McClory, who owns film rights to the story that served as the basis for the fourth James Bond picture, *Thunderball*. Columbia says it will use McClory's rights to produce a new Bond franchise, perhaps including a TV series.

"Columbia is saying they can start a whole new series to sort of rattle MGM/UA's cage. It's really a matter of what the law says," says *Tomorrow Never Dies* producer Michael Wilson.

Even though McClory already exercised his rights once with 1983's modestly successful *Thunderball* remake *Never Say Never Again*, MGM/UA says that won't happen again. "It's in the hands of the [lawyers] and I'm confident the true Bond, the original Bond, will persevere," says MGM/UA worldwide marketing president Jerry Rich. ◆



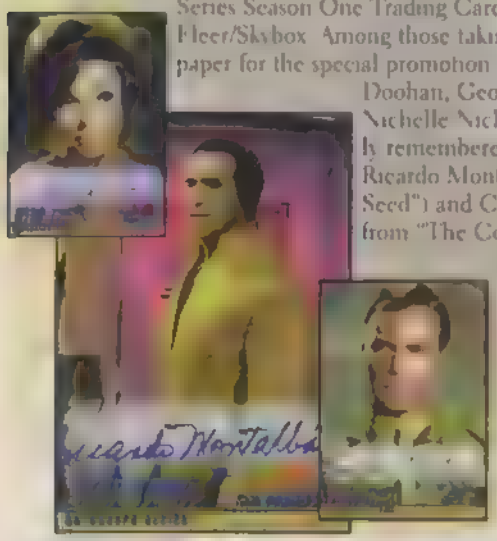
Sponge in a coral reef begins growing.
Sponge in a coral reef begins growing.
Sponge in a coral reef begins growing.
Sponge in a coral reef begins growing unchecked.
ending a world below. FOREVER.

Biodiversity. It's the web of life.

Preserve it. 1-800-CALL-WWF. World Wildlife Fund

Stacked Deck

[illegible] convention to get an autograph anymore. A new series of trading cards is giving collectors a shot at the John (and Jane) Hancocks of their favorite *Trek* actors. One autographed card will be inserted into every 36-pack box of the new *Star Trek*: The Original Series Season One Trading Cards from Fleer/Skybox. Among those taking putting pen to paper for the special promotion: Shatner, James Doohan, George Takei and Nichelle Nichols, as well as fondly remembered guest stars like Ricardo Montalban ("Space Seed") and Clint Howard (Balok from "The Corbomite Maneuver"). New trading cards focusing on Seasons Two and Three will be out sometime next year with autographs from DeForest Kelley (Dr. McCoy) and more *Trek* actors. ◆



Funny Business

It sounds like one of Dr. Clayton Forrester's sinister plots: two acclaimed comedy scribes are forced to watch hours of home videos and then write witty banter for cable vee jays Darsy Fuentes and John Fugel sang. And in a certain sense, *Mystery Science Theater 3000*'s mad doctor really is behind the plan, as *MST3K* co-founders and former writers J. Elvis Weinstein and Trace Beaulieu (the latter played both Forrester and Crow T. Robot) now serve as writers for the revamped *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

The news may trigger questions over whether or not the pair sold their souls to the devil (or Bob Saget), but Weinstein and Beaulieu are quick to reassure fans of *Mystery Science Theater* that evil forces are *not* at work. We're finding new ways to present [home video] clips so they don't have to always rely on guys getting hit in the nuts or falling on their ass [every episode]," Weinstein says. "People should at least watch and give it a chance." ◆

HOLLYWOOD

Star Wars

RCA Victor is releasing singles from the *Star Wars* and *Return of the Jedi* soundtracks. The singles feature Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes (also known as the Cantina band) and the Max Rebo Band (seen in Jabba's palace).

Regime

Dean Cain will star in horror author [illegible]'s writing for the small screen, a supernatural drama for CBS called *Rag & Bones*. The show, co-created by Rice, follows the adventures of a priest turned cop in (where else?) New Orleans.

Harry Knowles

He already created the illusion that giant bugs were chomping humans. For his next trick, *Starship Troopers* director Paul Verhoeven will helm the cine[illegible] artist Harry [illegible].

At the Helm

TNG star and *First Contact* director Jonathan Frakes will return to the director's chair for the ninth *Star Trek* film. Shooting for the new movie begins in March.

[illegible]

Actor Don Cheadle (*Devil in a Blue Dress, Boogie Nights*) will resurrect blaxploitation heroine Cleopatra Jones in a remake that he will write and direct. Cheadle promises that Cleopatra will be just as tough and stylish as the original.

[illegible]

Hong Kong's noted director John Woo will lend his distinctive style to *Blackjack*, a two-hour USA Network [illegible], big lug who trades in life as a U.S. Marshal for [illegible]. ◆

auteur Kevin Smith (*Chasing Amy*) are shaking their heads in disbelief at the writer-director's latest career move: penning and possibly directing the third installment in Chevy Chase's moribund *Fletch* series.

High Hopes

The Clan MacLeod better start ducking their heads again. Miramax action arm Dimension Films has inked *Highlander* television series star Adrian Paul to a $1 million contract to cut it up on the big screen in *Highlander IV*. While 1994's dreadful *Highlander—The Final Dimension* ignored both *Highlander II* and the series only to be decapitated at the box office, the new movie—to be written by *Virtuosity* screenwriter Eric Bernt—will retain the historical romance subtext that's made the TV series a hit in Europe.

Still, the movie should keep enough heads rolling to make fans of the blood-drenched films happy. There's no word if original star Christopher Lambert will make an appearance as the imperishable Connor MacLeod, but the fate of Paul's Duncan MacLeod is clear. Paul has already signed an option for a second picture. ◆

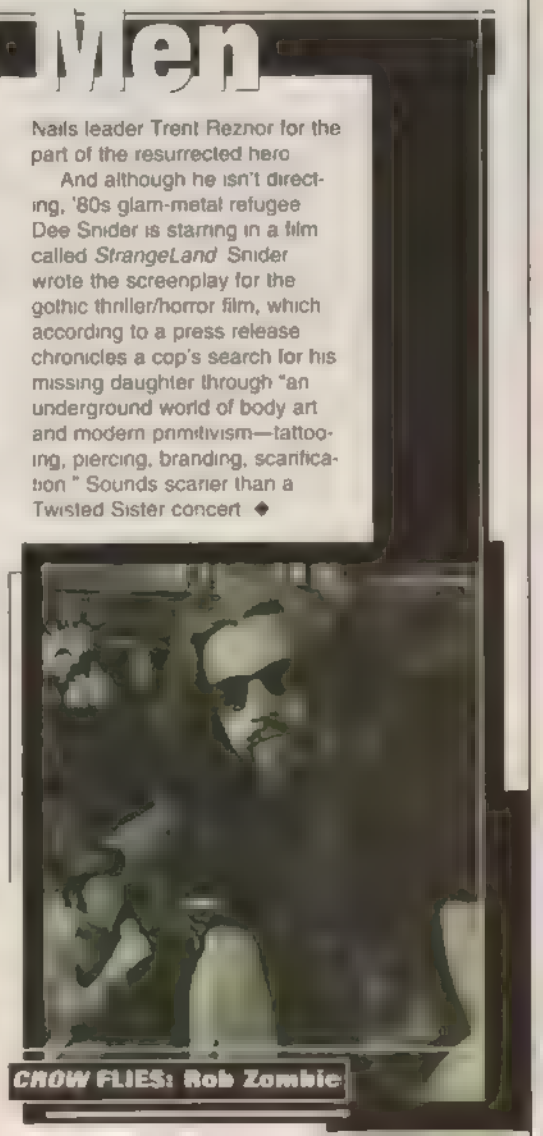
Music Men

So, you want to be a director? These days, you don't even have to sell your soul to the devil to get a shot at sitting in the all-important folding chair with your name inscribed on the back. All you need is a little gumption, a show-biz track record and, in some cases, a slightly eccentric appearance.

Three well-known rockers have taken their ambitions off the stage and behind the camera recently. Leading the pack is former Oingo Boingo frontman Danny Elfman. Elfman's high profile status as a composer on everything from *The Simpsons* to *Batman* and *Mars Attacks!* helped him land a deal to develop features, with an eye toward making his directorial debut for Hollywood Pictures.

Not to be outdone, Rob Zombie, vocalist for the horror metal/industrial band White Zombie, is ready to translate his oft-professed love for comics to the big screen by helming the upcoming third installment of *The Crow* series. In the process of script rewrites, the film is cloaked in uncertainty. No studio, actor or release date is yet tied to the project, though that hasn't dissuaded Internet rumormongers from speculating that Zombie might recruit Nine Inch Nails leader Trent Reznor for the part of the resurrected hero.

And although he isn't directing, '80s glam-metal refugee Dee Snider is starring in a film called *StrangeLand*. Snider wrote the screenplay for the gothic thriller/horror film, which according to a press release chronicles a cop's search for his missing daughter through "an underground world of body art and modern primitivism—tattooing, piercing, branding, scarification." Sounds scarier than a Twisted Sister concert. ◆



CROW FLIES: Rob Zombie

SURE THIS

Looking for up-to-the-minute movie info? Want to surf the best cinema sites on the Web? CINESCAPE's new online headquarters lets you pack in all the best the film world has to offer—just what you'd expect from CINESCAPE Specials, the last word in cutting-edge entertainment news.

RUSHES

WHY YOU SHOULD WATCH

When Minnie Driver snapped up a lead role in the action thriller *Hard Rain*, she was excited to both tackle the action genre and team up with the movie's other stars Christian Slater and Morgan Freeman. Unfortunately, the 27-year-old English actress' enthusiasm produced one slight oversight. "I tried to overlook the fact that it would involve being in water 24 hours a day," she says. "I must have been drunk."

It's not surprising Driver's mind suffered such an error of omission—anyone would have blocked out the prospect of being clobbered by millions of gallons of water during an 11-week shoot. That's the ordeal she faced making *Hard Rain*, the story of a Midwestern town besieged by both a monstrous flood and crafty thieves who use the disaster as the cover for an armored car robbery. But Driver insists that the film's more than another disaster flick. "It isn't something like *Twister* where the [catastrophe] is the star," she explains. "Instead it's this wonderful sort of backdrop."

Still, that soggy setting caused several headaches for the waterlogged actress. "There is not a scene in it where I'm dry," she says wearily. "It's not like [I could say], 'I'm going to walk around in the rain and enjoy being wet.' It was very difficult. It's quite hard to pretend to be drowning, instead you actually do drown a little bit."

Venturing into unknown waters isn't unusual for Driver. Ever since gaining 20 pounds to play the chubby heroine in the 1995 sleeper hit *Circle of Friends*, she's been a hot property in Hollywood. She's played a sexy Russian country-western singer (and one of the opening credits' dancing silhouettes) in the James Bond flick *GoldenEye*, Stanley Tucci's slighted girlfriend in the critical success *Big Night* and John Cusack's long-lost deejay love in the black comedy *Grosse Pointe Blank*. More recently, she's nabbed a lead role in Gus Van Sant's *Good Will Hunting*.

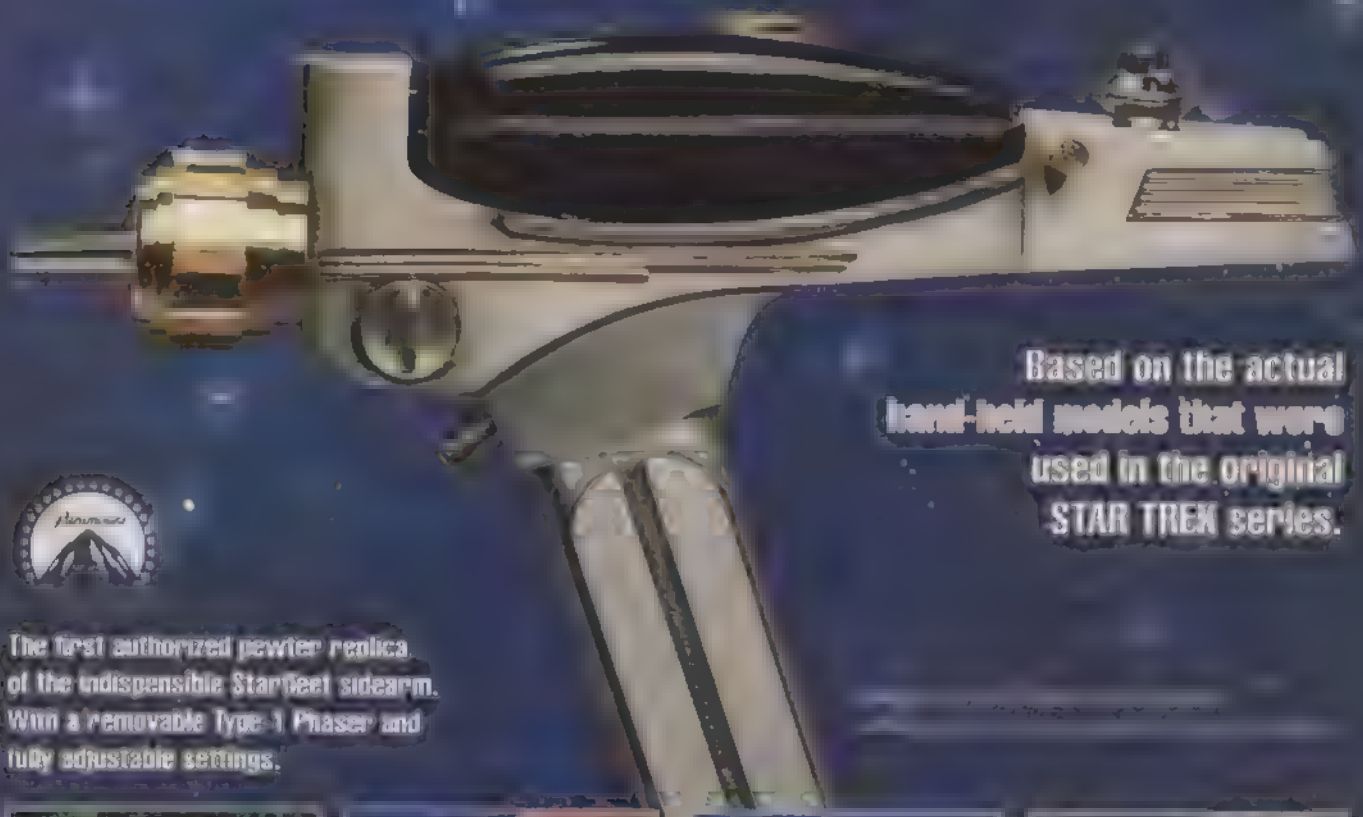
But after the grueling *Hard Rain* shoot, does Driver want to add any more action roles to her impressive resume? "Yeah, definitely. Definitely." She pauses for a moment and chuckles. "Well, maybe."

Annabelle Villanueva

Paramount Pictures presents a spectacular 30th Anniversary commemorative

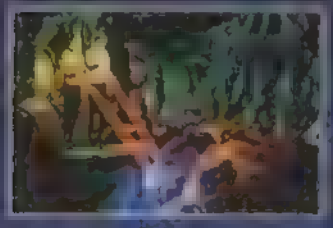
THE OFFICIAL STAR TREK® PHASER

LIMITED EDITION



Based on the actual hand-held models that were used in the original STAR TREK series.

The first authorized pewter replica of the indispensible Starfleet sidearm. With a removable Type 1 Phaser and fully adjustable settings.



...pewter replica of the great Starfleet sidearm, issued on the original U.S.S. ENTERPRISE®. Fully authenticated by Paramount Pictures. The handle of which is...

...The Master Type 1 Phaser has simply lots the for more power-ful pewter grade body. And both have fully adjustable settings. The side deflector dish is treated with 24-karat gold, the only accent from which...

...shield with flashing silver. Full-lead crystal, found in the front-faced crystal, house emitter filters from the rotary emitter.

...hardware to power your toy, Imported. Just STAR...

...Interactive Communicator™ you wish to order, by [illegible] payment in any of six available 30-day [illegible] of your receipt of this [illegible] you're not [illegible] return.

TM & © 1997 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. STAR TREK and Related Marks are Trademarks of Paramount Pictures.

Table top display shown much smaller than impressive actual size of 6" (15.24 cm) tall x 8" (20.32 cm) wide.

The Franklin Mint
Franklin Center, PA 19091-0001

Please enter my order for The Official STAR TREK Phaser™ authorized and fully authenticated by Paramount Pictures and issued in an edition forever limited to just 95 pewter casting days.

[illegible] MY PHASER NOW. I will be billed in 5 equal monthly installments of $39* each, with the first payment due prior to shipment.

*Plus [illegible] and a one-time charge of $4 for shipping and handling.

SIGNATURE _____

Please mail by February 28, 1998

MR./MRS./MISS _____

ADDRESS _____ APT. # _____

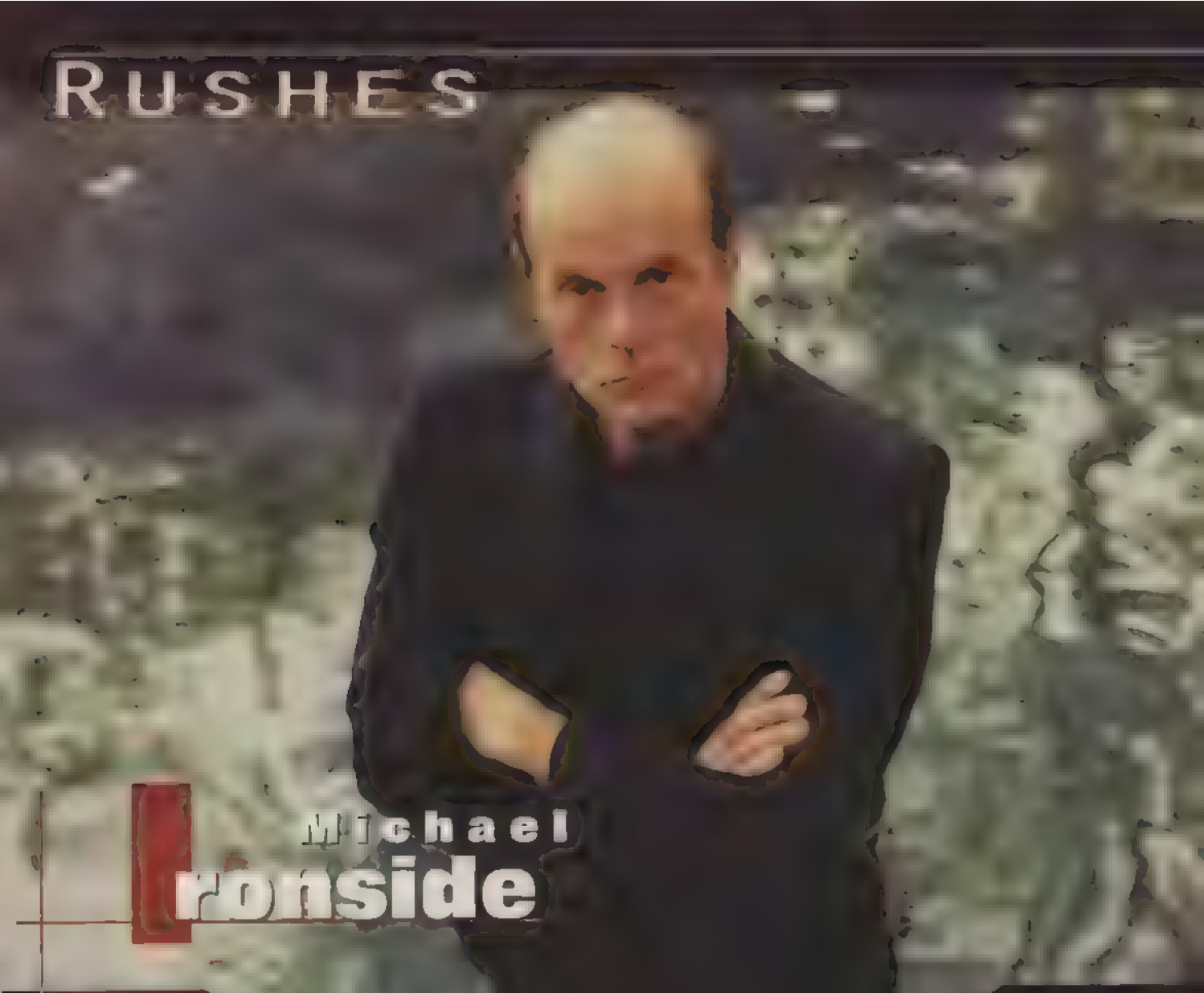
CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE # (_____) _____

17376-21-001

Fine pewter. Full-lead crystal. Accents of sterling silver and 24-karat gold.



Michael Ironside

Director Paul Verhoeven's special effects bonanza *Starship Troopers* didn't just astonish audiences. Even the normally low-key Michael Ironside says he was "blown away."

"I'll tell you the effect the film had on me," says the veteran character actor, who plays an ethics professor turned platoon leader in the film. "I got out of the screening and got in my car to pick my wife up. I was going up the freeway, and I looked down and realized I was doing 85 miles an hour plus! I got a very physical adrenaline rush from the film and I wasn't even aware of it."

A versatile actor with a charismatic persona and an uncommonly commanding voice, Ironside says he was attracted to the role because it gave him another opportunity to step outside the bounds of conventional drama, as did his turns as a telekenetic mutant in David Cronenberg's *Scanners* and as a bad guy in Verhoeven's *Total Recall* and Russell Mulchay's *Highlander II*.

"It's easier for me to be creative in a science-fiction [film], to take bigger risks as an actor, because I'm not in a modern setting. I don't have to worry about [an audience] saying, 'Well I wouldn't do that.' There's more of an operatic flair if it's science fiction," he explains.

Though he's made a specialty of sci-fi (including a brief stint on *SeaQuest DSV*), his resume includes movies and TV shows from every genre, from *Free Willy* and *Top Gun* to a recurring role on *ER*. He will next appear in an independent film titled *Going to Kansas City*, in which he portrays the racist deputy of a small town, and a murder mystery tentatively titled *Captive*.

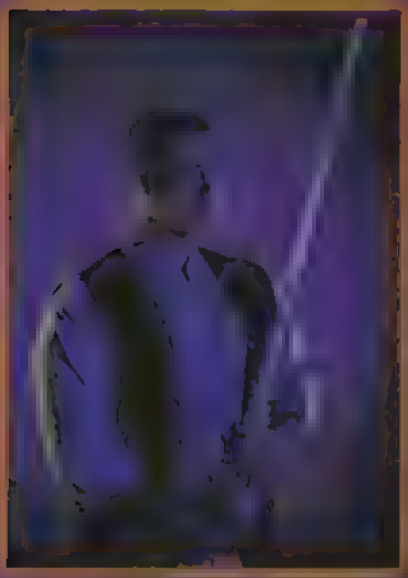
On the sci-fi front, Ironside is working to bring his pet project, a script called *Angel Rising*, to the screen. The film would explore a future world in which powerful pharmaceutical companies dominate mankind. "It's a story I think should be told," Ironside says.

When not speeding down the freeway, the actor directs his passion toward the great automobiles of the past, restoring 1960s classic muscle cars. "I'm kind of working out my motorhead fantasies from my teenage days," Ironside says. "These cars would go by and every orifice on my body would flare. Now that I'm in my mid-40s, I have a tendency to find cars that are all busted up and are going to die, and I bring them back to life. Cars speak to me sometimes. They're like art to me."

—*Gina McIntyre*

ROGUE II™

LIGHTSABER



ELECTRO-LUMINESCENT BLADE GLOWS LIKE NEON IN LOW LIGHT ENVIRONMENTS. (PAT. PENDING)

MASTER PARKS

9V BATTERY INCLUDED!

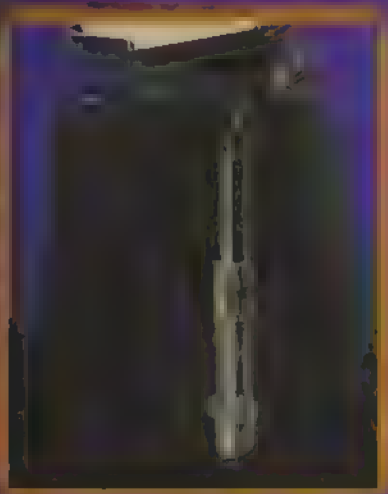
$350

(PRICE INCLUDES SHIPPING)

ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED

TO ORDER:
1205 N. AVE. C
ELGIN, TEXAS 78621
512-285-3556

REMOVABLE BLADE ALLOWS LIGHTSABER HILT TO BE WORN.



PARKS

LIGHTSABERS

...ATIONS AND THE PROPERTY OF PARKS™ LIGHTSABERS AND ©...

It might be Keanu Reeves' most excellent adventure yet—and one where Johnny Mnemonic is downloading another cyberthriller, this one called *Matrix*. A futuristic actioner, it will be helmed by fraternal critical darlings Andy and Larry Wachowski, the team behind the kinky thriller *Bound*.

"I'm really excited to do it," Reeves says. "It's the first science-fiction kung-fu movie."

Reeves will play Thomas Anderson, a mild-mannered computer hacker who leads a normal life in the 1990s until he discovers it's actually a couple hundred years later than that, with human reality being created and overseen by evil computer captors. Anderson breaks free from the computer delusion and joins a group of insurgent computer hackers (led by a big-name co-star, possibly Laurence Fishburne or Val Kilmer) who have rebelled against the enslaving digital matrix. "I'm a man who thinks he's in 1997 but he's not," Reeves says. "He goes on this journey to find the truth. We're going where only the Wachowskis can go."

The film is a comeback of sorts for the cyberthriller genre. After soaring in the 1980s with films like *Blade Runner* and David Cronenberg's cyberpunk classic *Videodrome*, the trend started crashing in the '90s with big-budget flops like *The Net*, *Hackers*, *Virtuosity*, *Strange Days* and Reeves' own cyberdud *Johnny Mnemonic*, which grossed a flimsy $19 million. Still, the *Devil's Advocate* star's spotty cyber-screen history didn't hinder his net worth—he managed to nab the *Matrix* role after the Wachowskis poured over a list of other big-name actors, all of whom failed to make the cut. "I think they liked my mind," he muses.

WEB HEAD

Despite crashing as Johnny Mnemonic, Keanu Reeves is jacking into the cyberpunk genre again with *Matrix*

By Annabelle Villanueva

And no one in Hollywood these days is going to second-guess the Wachowski brothers' opinion. Born and raised in Chicago, the twenty-something duo claim to have been a writing team since they were younger (the younger of the two was born). After they both dropped out of college, they ran a carpentry business and wrote comic books together before selling the script to *Assassins*, which became a modestly successful Sylvester Stallone/Antonio Banderas vehicle. They followed that up with their acclaimed feature directing debut, last year's stylish, sexy lesbian noir-tale *Bound*, a genre the brothers wanted to work in because it was relatively inexpensive to shoot.

Meanwhile, *Matrix* has been slowly but surely gaining steam. Producer Joel Silver, the Wachowskis, fans of directors like Sam Raimi and James Cameron, sold the spec script to producer Joel Silver (*Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon*), only to have the screenplay languish in development hell. When they became hot with the indie hit *Bound*, however, the studios were suddenly interested in whatever weird stuff was lining the bottom of their drawers.

"We wrote *Matrix* before *Bound*, but nothing happened," Andy Wachowski says. "It took a long time to work out the studio system. It's a lengthy process, like watching grass grow."

Filming is slated to begin in Australia in early 1998. As for plot specifics, Larry Wachowski is cagey about revealing too much of the story and explaining how the nefarious computer network will look. "It's sort of like if we were to rewrite *Star Wars*," he says. "The evil emperor of the galaxy is the malevolent machine world on a spaceship?"

Best of all, it's a weird *Star Wars*, a strange cyber-[illegible] says Andy, [illegible] time around.

That's the problem," Andy says over a cluttered Hollywood [illegible] want to see the coolest action [illegible]

eat got!

WITH THE *STAR WARS* PREQUELS ON THE WAY, EWAN MCGREGOR IS FEELING THE POWER OF THE FORCE

BY CINDY PEARLMAN

No one likes a jittery Jedi. On the first day of filming the new *Star Wars* movie, the Force overpowered Ewan McGregor, causing him to do something quite shocking for a Jedi

He dropped his lightsaber.

"The first take and my lightsaber literally flew out of my hands," says the 26-year-old Scotsman, who plays the young Obi-Wan Kenobi. "No one tells you the sabers have about 10-D batteries in them. They burn your hands."

So when director George Lucas yelled "Action!" McGregor yelled "Ow!" And if that's not already a bad omen, consider the following: "I tossed the saber up in the air and it ended up hitting a technician in the head," he adds rather sheepishly

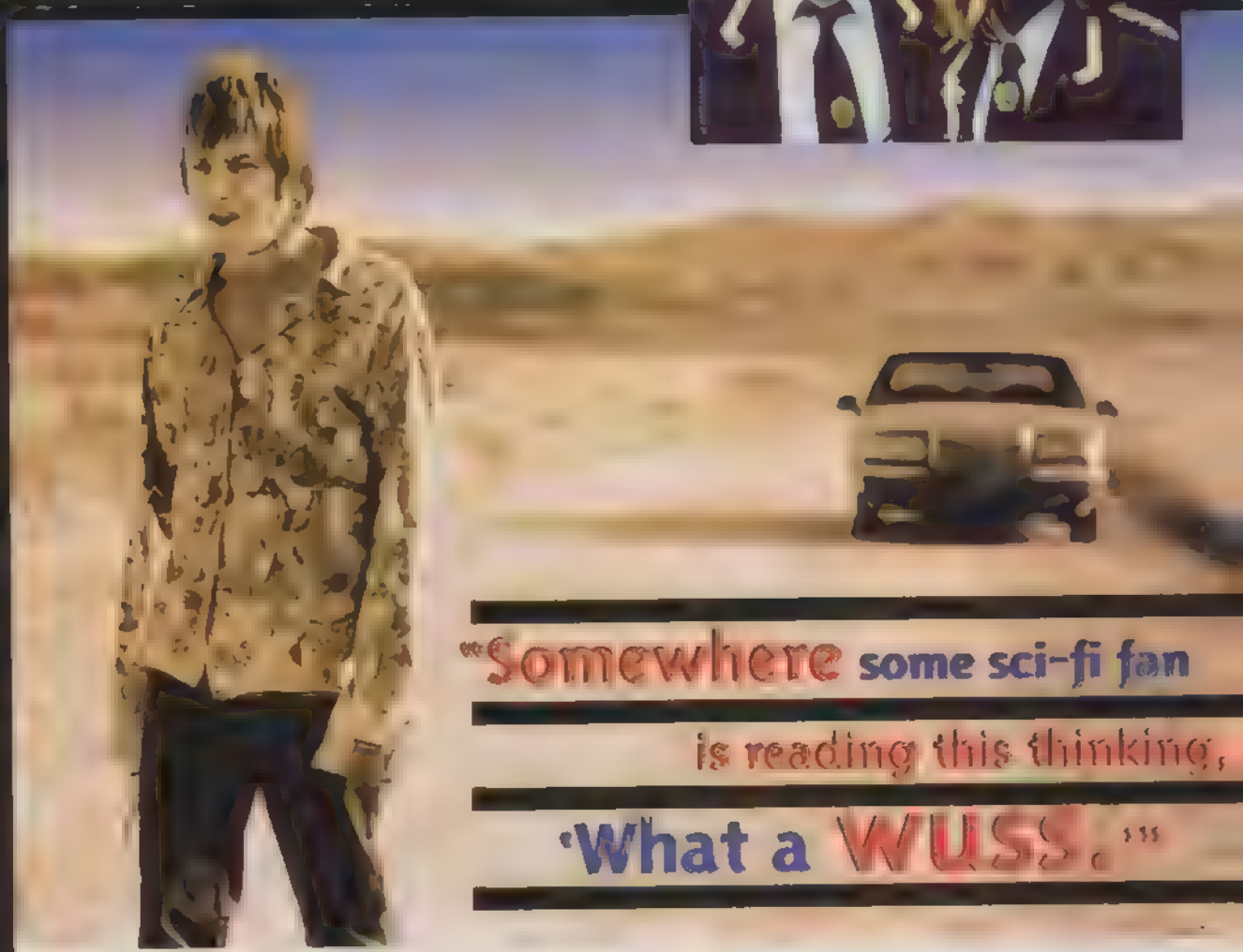
Yes, the fate of the universe is in the hands of a klutz.

And on cue, [illegible] tends to [illegible] bouts of [illegible] to boot. Talk about star woes.

McGregor walks into a New York hotel suite on an early Sunday morning looking like he needed the Force to get out of bed. The scruffy actor, wearing jeans, a blue blazer and white T-shirt, has ditched being a knight for some night life instead. Last evening he partied with the British rock group Oasis in town to perform on *Saturday Night Live*.

I [illegible] but scared about what I might [illegible] I'm a little clumsy, McGregor admits. Now for an exclusive: Everything [illegible] "Practice," says the London resident.

But who can blame McGregor if he wants to celebrate? He just wrapped filming the first *Star Wars* prequel, due out in 1999. He's also signed as young Obi-Wan in two more prequels, which are expected to show up in 2001 and 2003. His last project, the romantic comedy/road flick *A Life Less Ordinary*, paired him with comely Cameron Diaz and re-teamed him with those lads from *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave*, director Danny Boyle and writer John Hodge.



"Somewhere some sci-fi fan is reading this thinking, 'What a WUSS.'"

In fact, McGregor's life is pretty extraordinary. Forget about that battery-juiced lightsaber. These days, it's McGregor who is the hottest thing in Hollywood. Or as he sums it up in his not-so-thick Scottish brogue: "I'm a pretty lucky bloke."

And, by all accounts, a good-natured one, too. McGregor knows nothing can stop the inevitable *Star Wars* inquiries. Where to start? How is Cleavland looking these days? "Not bad for someone who is a complete [illegible]."

What ever [illegible] spices up?

Even [illegible] blighted [illegible] you now," he says.

Eventually, though, he can't resist. "Let's just say, I do have the sexiest wheels," he [illegible] style.

Joke's on [illegible], McGregor still seems to be reeling from being handed one of the most coveted roles on any planet. "I still can't think about it," he says. "There is no doubt that this movie is the biggest thing that [illegible]."

For a long time, the sheer magnitude of *Star Wars* made McGregor very jittery. "When I first got the *Star Wars* prequel, I honestly thought, 'Maybe this is not the right thing for me to do.' Then I went through a stage where I couldn't even think about it. I was kind of in *Star Wars* denial

And there's no self-help group for that or s

McGregor got the role after months of speculation and name-tossing. Suppose ll everyone from Leonardo DiC prio to Brad P tt was being considered for G rge Lucas' three new prequels.

So, how did he feel the first time he put on the Kenobi suit? "Pretty damn good," he exclaims. And enough with this confidentiality nonsense. "One day I came home from a tough day on the *Star Wars* set and my wife and her friends were assembled," he admits. "They wanted to know why I looked so happy. Like a kid, I say, 'I acted with R2-D2 today.' And there was a respectful moment of silence until one of the women said, 'And how is he doing?' Like he is a person.

So how's he doing?

A little upset that he was in a career lull for a few years, but basically happy to be working again," says McGregor.

After the actual shoot, McGregor admits, "It's rough because you act against a backdrop of nothing. You're not sure about the finished product. That's not satisfying artistically. Then again, those saber battles are like swashbuckling. Every once in a while, I'd be in one of those and go, 'Stop. And my inner child would scream, 'Aaaah! I'm in *Star Wars*!'"

Despite his excitement, McGregor almost had to put the Force on hold. Originally, the *Little Voice Ordinary* actor was contracted with *Star Wars*. I would have done Danny Boyle's film if pre-production hadn't come to shove," says McGregor. "I really love being a part of his team."

Boyle returns the compliment. "I was happens to be the best film actor in Britain. He's like Gary Oldman and Daniel Day-Lewis rolled into one."

When McGregor was a young boy growing up in Crieff, Scotland—where his father taught at a boarding school—Hollywood seemed like an impossible dream. At age 9, he decided to act. Maybe it was those Elvis posters on his bedroom wall. Or that his uncle, Dennis Lawson, copped a bit part as Wedge the X-wing fighter pilot in the original *Star Wars*. "Uncle Dennis would come to town and he was [illegible]," he says. "He had [illegible] and this incredible sheepskin waistcoat. He was Hollywood, man, and I wanted in."

At 16, McGregor left home to work as a stage [illegible] before entering the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. His break was starring in the British serial *Lipstick on Your Collar*, followed by *Brassed Off* and *The Pillow Book*. Then Danny Boyle cast him in *Trainspotting*, launching McGregor's career as a heartthrob for [illegible]. Interest Magazine [illegible] as one of the 50 sexiest stars [illegible] on *TRL*.

"A lad can find a good pub in Chicago," he offers. But for all his good-[illegible] Casanova-ish McGregor can't [illegible] be [illegible] with his wife, Eve, a French production designer, [illegible] their baby daughter, Clara. I tend to leave when [illegible] still asleep and I'm lucky if she's awake when I get [illegible]. And it's the same thing when I'm working [illegible].

He says the McGregors are ready for *Star Wars* mania. "I looked at an interview Vera Gemma did when she was on Oprah. He said, 'My favorite thing about *Star Wars* is that I delivered the lines and I hope that's the background noise I'll be remembered by.'

Actually, McGregor can't be better than Gemma. You can't hold a candle to her. Can I come to the next interesting beer-[illegible] secrets about *Star Wars*: Yeah, O.K.," McGregor grumbles. "When I was six, I did have *Star Wars* sheets and a C-[illegible] pillowcase.

He sighs heavily. "Not a whole lot more [illegible] reading this. Fucking. What a mess. ◆

SCRIPTURE SHOWN: Before swinging a lightsaber in George Lucas' epic, Ewan McGregor appeared in films such as (clockwise) *Nightwatch*, *A Life Less Ordinary* and *Brassed Off*

Hit Rocks

Deep Impact and Armageddon continue the disaster-epic revival and streak toward a multimillion dollar box-office collision

by Edward Gross

Chicken Little has nothing on Hollywood. The sky is falling and La La Land is doing everything in its power to make sure that you care about it.

Last year, NBC scored meteoric ratings with its moronic miniseries *Asteroid*. James Cameron wrote, submitted to various studios and ultimately withdrew a rock-against-us thriller called *Bright Angel Falling*, and now Paramount Pictures, DreamWorks SKG and Sony are tackling their own man-versus-the-flying-boulders entries *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon*.

Imagine that two studios engaged in a competitive, big-budget struggle with similar ideas. Why, that hasn't happened since 1983, when both Roger Moore and Sean Connery had James Bond vehicles in the theaters (*Octopussy* and *Never Say Never Again*), or 1987-1988, when audiences were subjected to no less than four children who-become-grownups flicks (*Big*, *13 Going on 30*, *Vice Versa* and *Like Father, Like Son*), or 1996-1997 with *Titanic* the miniseries, *Titanic* the musical and James Cameron's *Titanic* the epic, or, also in 1997, the dueling lava flicks *Dante's Peak* and *Volcano*. Yep, pretty rare happenings in Tinseltown.

Producer David Brown, who is producing *Deep Impact* with long-time collaborator Richard Zanuck, says such matters were handled differently in the good old days.

"I remember when I was a mogul," Brown says with a laugh. "It was a time when executives could call each other and say, 'You're not going to do this to me, are you?' 'Of course not, we're all in this together.' 'Great, let's save the industry.' Well, that doesn't go on anymore. Now it's every mogul for himself."

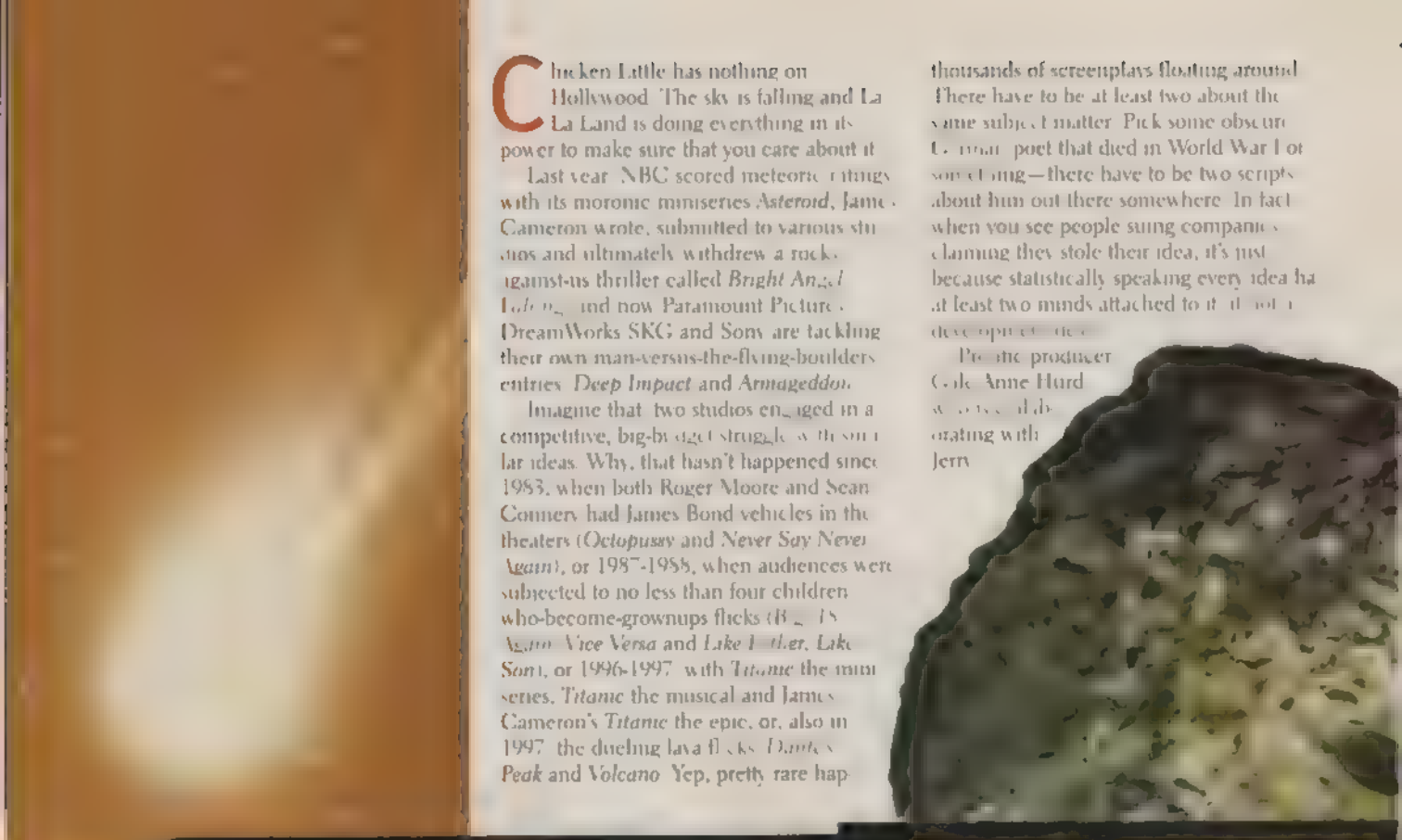
But Rex Weiner, a staff reporter for *Variety*, notes that in the past the studios would often produce similar movies whether they were Westerns, swashbucklers or other variations on a theme.

"Each studio would put out 100 pictures a year," he says, "so the chances were very good that they would be doing the same thing as each other year in and year out. Studios put out fewer pictures now, but the chances of doing the same kind of picture are pretty high anyway. You have to look at it statistically. At any one time there are thousands of screenplays floating around. There have to be at least two about the same subject matter. Pick some obscure German poet that died in World War I or something—there have to be two scripts about him out there somewhere. In fact, when you see people suing companies claiming they stole their idea, it's just because statistically speaking every idea has at least two minds attached to it. It's not a deep-pocket [illegible]."

Pro[illegible] producer Gale Anne Hurd [illegible] collaborating with Jerry Bruckheimer on *Armageddon*, isn't fearful of the similarities between the two films. She cites *Big* as an example of how, in the end, those similarities don't really matter.

"*Big* was the third body-switching movie to come out and the one that made the most money and was the best movie," she observes. "You've got to focus on making your movie as good as it possibly can be, so it stands on its own regardless of whether there's a movie with a similar tagline coming out before us. When I did *The Abyss*, people thought of it as a flop. But it made over $60 million in the U.S. alone, and well over $150 million worldwide. That was the third underwater movie with some sort of alien or monster following *DeepStar Six* and *Leviathan*."

"The bottom line is you really can't second guess your own movie," she adds. "One reason I think there are so many similar films is that the technology for visual effects has gotten to the point where you can create great effects. You reach the point where people who had similar concepts years ago are also on the fast track given that there is enthusiasm for big-concept movies and we have the technology to bring them to life in a way that people haven't seen before. In the past there were, relatively speaking, very



"The bottom line [illegible] Deep Impact

special effects movies

few films that relied on visual effects. Today there are a lot more.

Deep Impact's Zanuck admits that he wishes *Armageddon* wasn't on the horizon, but, like Hurd, he's not too disturbed about the situation, feeling that the films' differences are more striking than their similarities. "I've read their script," he admits, "and they're doing a kind of *Dirty Dozen* cartoon. We're very serious about this. *Deep Impact* is more like *On the Beach* in its approach. They take a real Bruce Willis *Die Hard* kind of approach. I'm not worried about direct comparisons at all. Plus we're out first.

I think you'd have to have your head in the sand not to be concerned," counters *Armageddon*'s Bruckheimer. You've got to be concerned about it. There are talented people working on their piece, too. I have not read the script for *Deep Impact*, but I am told that they are different movies. Hopefully the audience will want to see two different stories with the same backdrop.

Jonathan Hensleigh, *Armageddon*'s screenwriter who's currently prepping to write and direct a big-screen version of *The Incredible Hulk*, is more than happy to call it as he sees it. He notes that it's not surprising that so many projects about asteroids went into development at around the same time, as there had been numerous articles and TV documentaries on the subject.

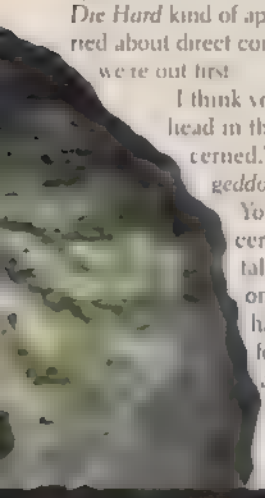
"One reads that or sees it on TV and it strikes a chord," he explains. Creative types in Hollywood are intrigued. Then it all comes down to what's the best version. What's the cool idea from that? That's the man's game. The boy's game is, 'Let's make a picture about an asteroid.' Anybody can write a script about that. You can have the asteroid impact Earth and the film could be about the aftermath, like the British film *Threads* or the TV miniseries *The Day After*. Or you could call it *Escape From Earth* and it could be about a bunch of astronauts who get away from earth just in time to go off to another planet to start homo sapiens anew. There are a thousand ways of doing the story. I knew there were three or four other asteroid projects out there and in my opinion every other project sucked. They just did not have the meatiness or the gravity or the possibilities for humor. My concept had all that. It had possibilities for humor, for hugely courageous and self-sacrificing acts, and it had a real rousing, action-adventure potential as well. The others were just hackneyed, old, tired storylines."

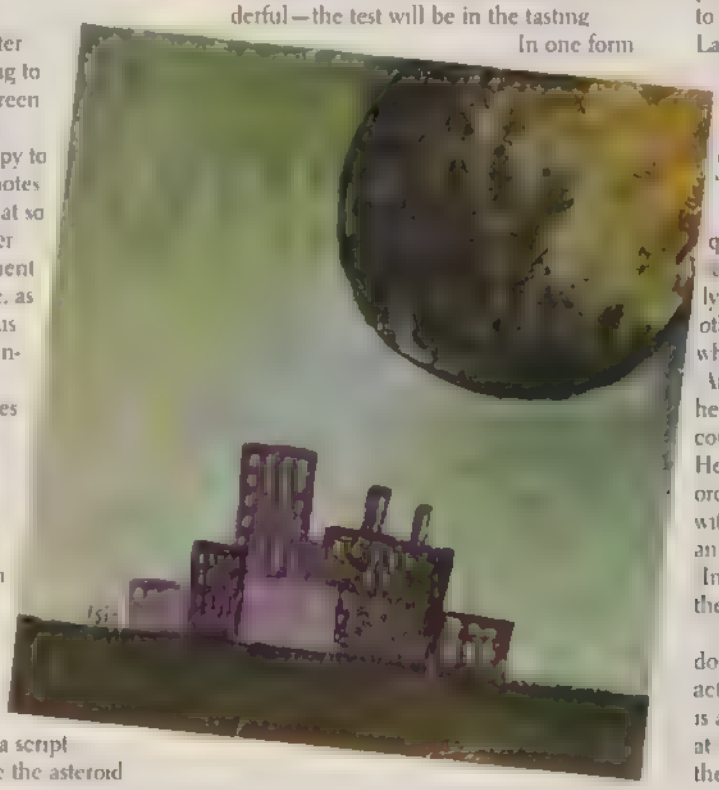
But as David Brown admits, "No one's expecting to buy the producer's evaluation of a movie. All of their children are wonderful—the test will be in the tasting."

In one form or another *Deep Impact* has been in development for nearly two decades. Inspired by the old George Pal film *When Worlds Collide*, Zanuck and Brown had brought the project to Paramount. But because of a change in studio regimes, it was essentially forgotten until about two-and-a-half years ago. At that point, Brown came across a treatment and memorandum and saw the potential—given today's filmmaking technology—in bringing it to life again. The duo, who also produce independently of each other, went to Paramount's Stanley Jaffe and Sherry Lansing to get the studio's support, which they received immediately. Then they turned to Steven Spielberg, whose *Jaws* and *The Sugarland Express* they also produced and who Brown says became "obsessed" with the project.

"Spielberg was committed to direct, no question about that," says Brown. "The subject matter of the movie, which is apocalyptic, was also being addressed by two other companies at the time. Mr. Spielberg, who had two films to direct for DreamWorks (*Amistad* and *Saving Private Ryan*) decided he would be executive producer because we couldn't wait for him to finish those films. He nominated Mimi Leder, who is an extraordinary director. She is directing this film with rare grace and making it far more than an actioner, as the trade papers put it. Instead it's a character-driven movie about the world in terminal crisis.

We're very happy with what she's done," says Zanuck. "She's able to handle actors beautifully. That's what this picture is all about, human emotions. She's great at that, and yet she is also able to do all the physical stuff.



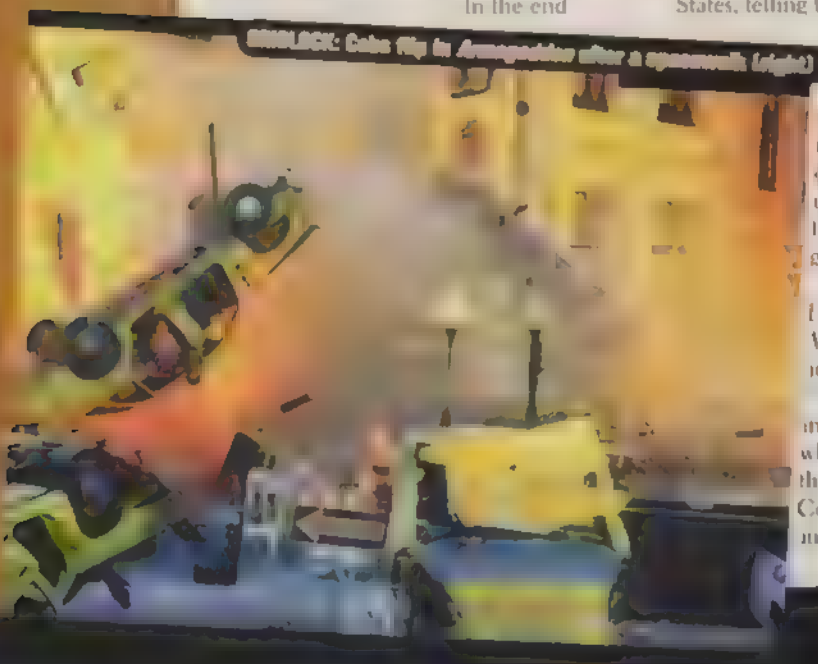


and Armageddon are both about the same damn thing."

Rex Weiner, *Variety*

Deep Impact boasts not one but four storylines all tied together by an asteroid headed directly for Earth. Leah Wood detects the meteoroid, a television journalist portrayed by Téa Leoni accidentally stumbles on the story, the President of the United States (Morgan Freeman) struggles to run a country and help his people through the crisis; and a team of astronauts led by Robert Duvall attempt to deflect the asteroid with an advanced space vessel named the Messiah.

In the end



SHOCK: Cube fly in *Armageddon* after a spacewalk (right)

affected forever. Most of life as we know it will end. It's not a big action picture until the very end of the film.

"It's a movie that will be remembered for its intimate moments as much as its gargantuan effects," adds Brown. "We had a scene in Times Square—I'm very proud of this, being a chauvinistic New Yorker—where the city turned the area over to us from 11 at night until dawn. Over this throng was the huge image of Morgan Freeman as the President of the United States, telling them the crisis the world is in. Without going into too much detail, it does deal with the reaction of people—individuals, not just the crowd—to that news. It also deals with the human spirit under adversity. I hope that the film is not damned by good taste and good writing."

It's Hurd's opinion that *Deep Impact*'s rival project *Armageddon*, will deliver character as well as spectacle. These characters would be interesting regardless of whether they had the fate of the world in their hands or not. Certainly that fact ups the ante, but they've very colorful

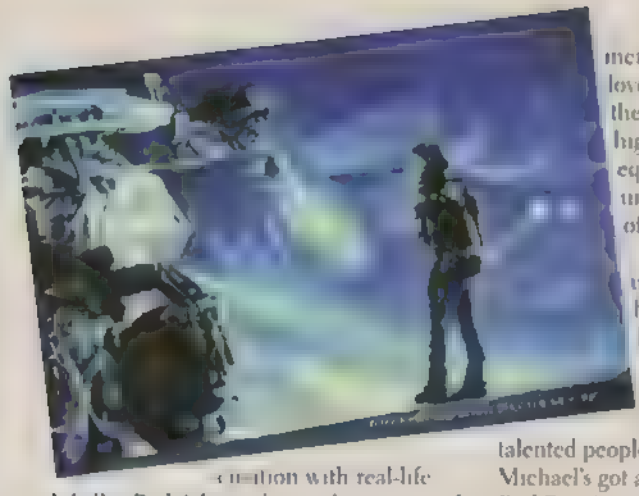
though, there is, as the title suggests, a deep impact, resulting in massive earthquakes and tidal waves that devastate much of the globe.

"This is not a disaster movie," says Zanuck. "and those people coming to see it [with] great special effects will be disappointed. It does have a certain amount of calamity because the only efforts that the Earth puts forth to stop this collision are [not] totally successful. But it's really about the personal relationships and how they react to the fact that the earth as we know it will be

characters regardless," she says. "There's also dramatic conflict, so it's not really just man versus asteroid. I've done that movie with man versus volcano [*Dante's Peak*]. In this film there's really a lot more going on. There's drama that even precedes the [spectacular] asteroid collision. I do trust [that] of these so-called disaster films can get away with just spectacle, but then you have to reach the next level."

Hensleigh believes that the film does achieve that, although it is, in the end, designed as an entertainment. The premise, like *Deep Impact*, has an asteroid heading for Earth and a team going into space attempting to alter its course. The difference is that most of the film takes place [in] space. Lead character Harry Stamper (Bruce Willis) and his team must [land] on the asteroid, dig [down] a hole in it and deposit a couple of nuclear weapons in the hopes that the ensuing explosion will [destroy] the rock or shift its trajectory.

As he explains it, Hensleigh's inspiration for the story [came] from [a]



incredible appeal to me. What I loved about it was that NASA, the last bastion of ultra, super high-tech technology and equipment, has to go into this unbelievably low-tech world of oil drilling.

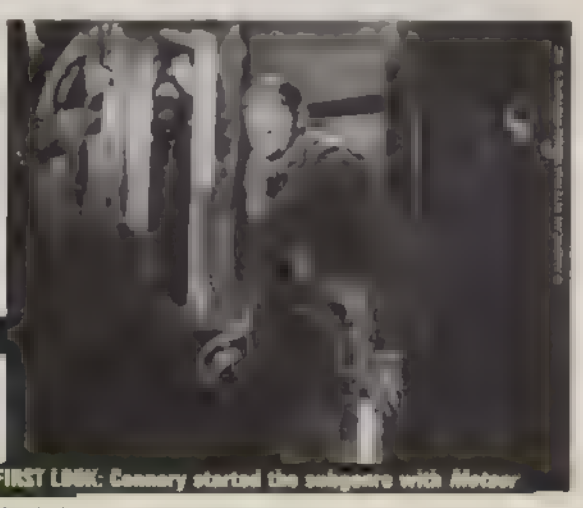
"I think the characters are unique in this film," Bruckheimer adds. "I also think its look is very different, because there's only one director like Michael Bay. Not to say that *Deep Impact* doesn't have talented people, because it does, but Michael's got a unique vision and talent. *Bad Boys* is a great example of Michael's talent because how many cop movies have you seen that involve drugs and police and buddies? Yet when we made *Bad Boys*, it was completely unique. That's what we're going to do with *Armageddon* as well—keep it unique."

It's the opinion of Robert Buckshaum of Reel Source, Inc., a Los Angeles firm that attempts to project box-office gross, that when two similar films are being readied for release, there is much more eye-rolling than enthusiasm on the audience's part. "If you look at the two volcano films," he says, "I think the public thought it was overkill even though there was so much buzz surrounding them and they were originally set to open so close to each other. As the films came out, the audience said, 'This is really no big deal,' and as a result they didn't do as well as expected. The truth is, disaster films aren't doing as well as anyone expected. *Titanic*, for instance, is being billed as a romance, whereas initially it was a big action flick. *Flood*'s [name] has been changed to *Hard Rain* because they didn't want people to think it was a disaster film. It's kind of interesting that the asteroid films are being referred to as disaster films despite the box-office performance of *Daylight*, *Dante's Peak* and *Volcano*."

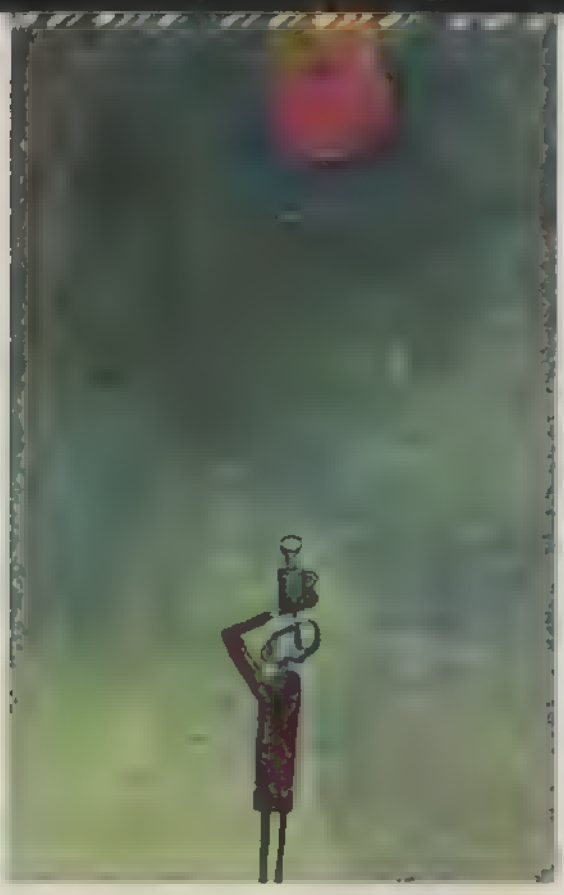
Buckshaum further points out that romance is hot at the box office, particularly with younger audiences, which could negatively affect these films if there is no romance involved. "If it's all action and brainless, people aren't going to see it," he says matter-of-factly. "It has to have some intelligent elements. Even Jerry Bruckheimer's films don't always perform like they used to. Films like *Con Air*, which is strictly an action film even though it had Nicolas Cage, didn't do as well as they had expected. The difference between *Air Force One* and *Con Air* is pretty evident. [In *Titanic* there's only like 20 minutes of the ship actually sinking, and the rest is strictly romance. But it doesn't matter. It's three hours and 13 minutes long, but you can't take your eyes off the screen."

Variety's Weiner believes a lot of the films' individual success will come down to the way they are marketed by the studios, who have the task of making sure that the public knows they differ from each other significantly. Release dates—*Deep Impact* is scheduled for May, *Armageddon* for July—also are extremely important, as is the talent involved in front of and behind the camera. "The business of getting the films to the theaters is an intricate dance in itself," he says. "When faced with another picture of a similar theme or similar subject matter, it becomes even trickier. We've had the volcano movies already and the general thinking was that the one that came out first won the day. Now we're supposed to have two James Bond movies being made. That happened before, and in the same year that *Octopussy* and *Never Say Never Again* were released, one in the summer and the other in the fall, they both did over $100 million domestically. It's a complicated situation."

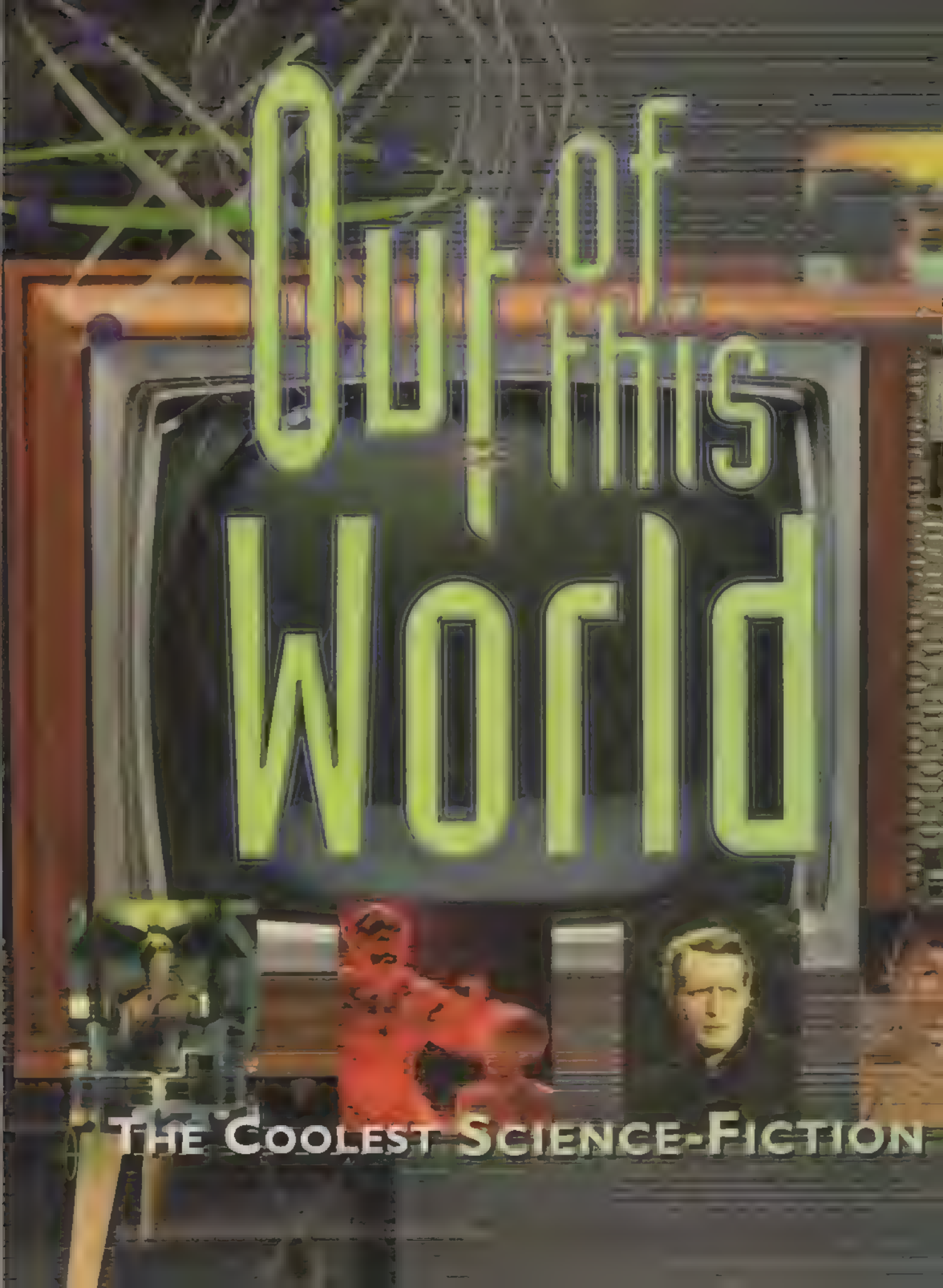
"The bottom line," he adds, "is that *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* are both special effects movies about the same damn thing. The [studios] are going to have to differentiate between the two in terms of marketing and the release schedule. You've got to look to see what's going to make these two pictures different, but usually it's not much more than the date and the poster." ◆



FIRST LOOK: Connery starred the subgenre with *Meteor*



Out of this World



THE COOLEST SCIENCE-FICTION

Being cool is a zen thing. You can't *try* to be it. You just are it—or you're not.

The same holds true for sci-fi TV. Good ratings don't make a show cool. Great special effects don't make a show cool. A show is cool just because it is.

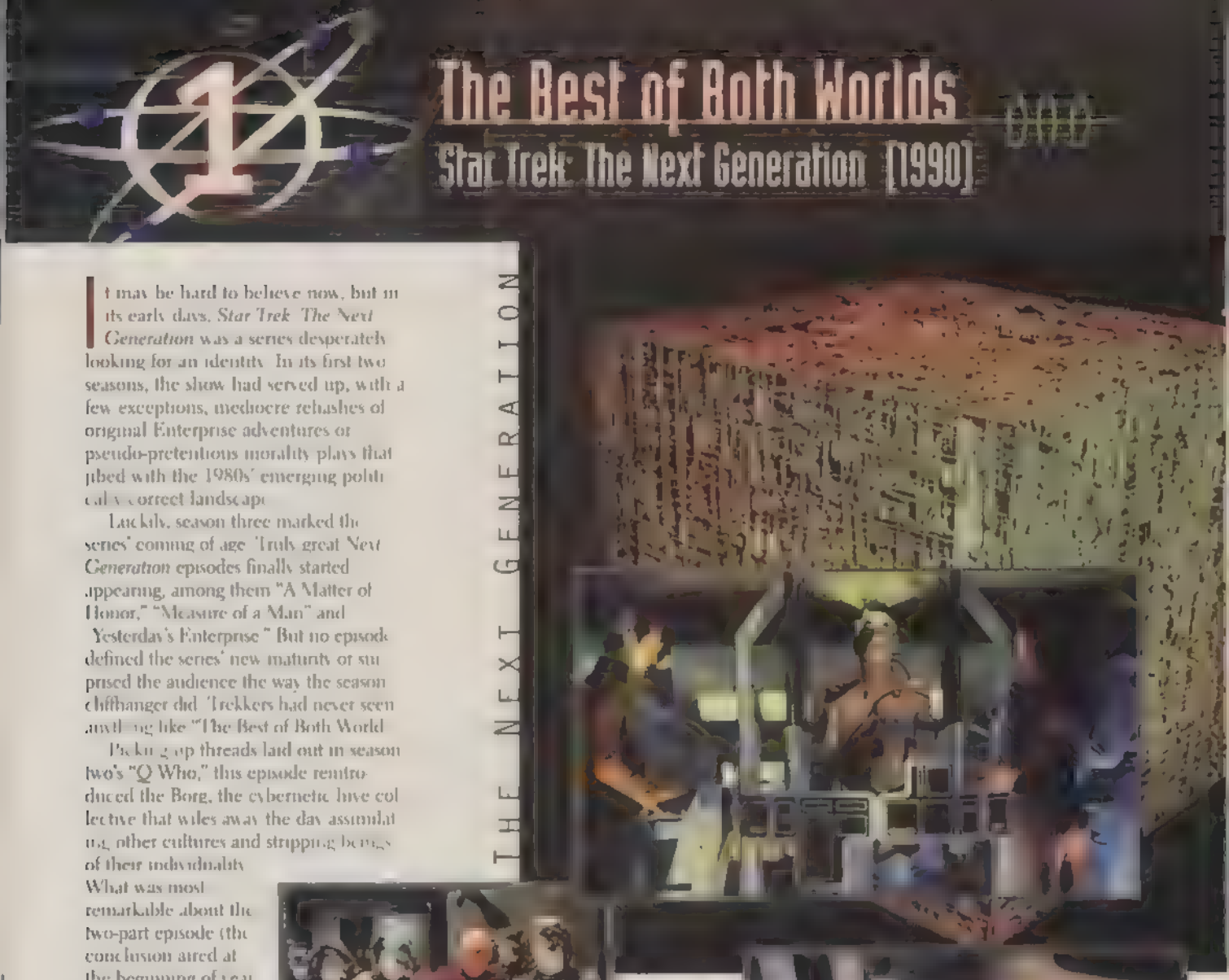
Of course, coolness—like meditation—is subjective: One fan's bliss is another fan's boring. Which is not to say the question of cool is unanswerable. Like the Supreme Court once said about pornography: We know it when we see it. Thus, we have taken up the challenge and picked the 10 coolest science-fiction episodes ever aired on television. The methodology is straightforward: the episodes must have originality, intelligence, wit, overall importance—and a hearty dash of *je ne sais quoi*.

The Chosen 10 range from the profound to the ridiculous, from Hollywood slick to cardboard-set sloppy. But regardless of production values, each show represents a key facet of sci-fi TV. It can be exciting, it can be funny, it can be insightful and it can be just plain weird. And at its best, it can be very, very cool.

STORIES IN TELEVISION HISTORY

The Best of Both Worlds

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1990)



It may be hard to believe now, but in its early days, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was a series desperately looking for an identity. In its first two seasons, the show had served up, with a few exceptions, mediocre rehashes of original Enterprise adventures or pseudo-pretentious morality plays that jibed with the 1980s' emerging politically correct landscape.

Luckily, season three marked the series' coming of age. Truly great *Next Generation* episodes finally started appearing, among them "A Matter of Honor," "Measure of a Man" and "Yesterday's Enterprise." But no episode defined the series' new maturity or surprised the audience the way the season cliffhanger did. Trekkers had never seen anything like "The Best of Both Worlds."

Picking up threads laid out in season two's "Q Who," this episode reintroduced the Borg, the cybernetic hive collective that wiles away the day assimilating other cultures and stripping beings of their individuality. What was most remarkable about the two-part episode (the conclusion aired at the beginning of year four) was that it was jam-packed with conflict within the Enterprise crew, something that *Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry had frowned on throughout the original series and early on in *Next Generation*'s run (his theory being that by the 24th century, humankind will be so advanced and enlightened that people won't even argue at work anymore).

In "Best of Both Worlds," over-eager Borg expert Cmdr. Shelby, who lusts after Cmdr. Riker's position on the Enterprise, is the focal point for much of the dissension. But there is also Riker's conflicted feelings about being made the *real* number one of the Enterprise in Capt. Picard's absence. And Picard and Riker have a showdown of their own after Picard is assimilated into the collective and becomes the Borg "Locutus," he and Riker face off in a battle of wits with the fate of the Earth hanging in the balance.

The Borg, with or without Picard as their ersatz leader, proved a force to be reckoned with — they became the most popular *Trek* antagonists since the Klingons in the 60s, even headlining the second *Next Gen* feature film in 1996. The success of the Borg story-arc assured *The Next Generation*'s future and its place in pop culture. Most importantly, it proved that *Star Trek* wasn't a has been and gone. The final frontier was still just a dangerous and exciting...

Edward Gross, Steve Hockensmith and Douglas Perry

Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"

The X-Files (1996)

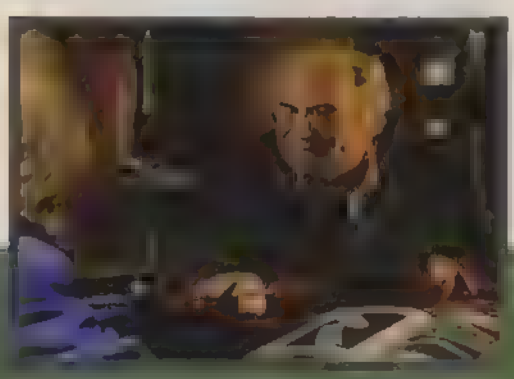
"Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" opens exactly the way you would expect a sci-fi TV episode to begin. A starry sky. A low rumble. An ominous, triangular shape moves across the horizon. Then the camera pulls back to reveal that the seemingly huge object we're looking at is the undercarriage of a hydraulic lift that's raising a repairman to the top of a telephone pole.

In those four opening seconds, "Jose Chung's From Outer Space'" has already made its point. Seeing is believing, and what we think we see is very often not there at all.

Produced late in *The X-Files*' third season, this episode by Emmy-winning scripter Darin Morgan is the perfect crystalization of the series' themes. It takes familiar elements like government conspiracies and alien abductions and bends them through the prism of subjectivity. "The truth might be out there," it says, "but then again it might not. What's the truth, anyway?"

The episode revolves around author Jose Chung (a perfectly cast Charles Nelson Reilly) who is researching a possible alien abduction case involving two teens. His investigation brings him to an FBI agent who has also looked into the case, Dana Scully, and the two compare notes. But the more the two talk, the less they find they know. The two teens supposedly abducted have conflicting stories about what happened, the telephone repairman who witnessed it has a completely different account, a pathetic abductee wannabe has his own point of view and, in the end, even Scully and her partner Mulder fashion versions of the truth that don't match up.

Morgan's witty script doesn't just satirize conspiracy theories and the UFO phenomenon, it also skewers the series' own assumptions about the paranormal and the truth. The final viewpoint we see is Chung's, and his take on Mulder—the FBI agent is "a ticking timebomb of insanity" who spends his spare time watching Bigfoot movies—is both hilariously wrong and absolutely correct. It's one of television's classic post-modern moments. Never has a science-fiction show walked the fine line between self-awareness and self-parody with such brilliant grace.—*S.H.*



THE X-FILES

3

Arrival

The Prisoner (1967)

Future Frustration

That's what star and producer Patrick McGoohan had to offer viewers—because he was quite sure what he himself had. After all, Captain Kirk would never fail. Marshal Dillon would never doubt himself. What was going on here?

No previous television series so confidently and completely upended genre conventions—and as a result, only *Star Trek* has been more obsessively analyzed by genre TV fans over the past 35 years. We all live in the show's oppressive Village, scholars tell us. It is Camus's absurd world in microcosm and McGoohan's "Prisoner" as the character is known, is the Sisyphean hero.

Maybe so. But whatever the philosophical underpinning of the short-lived British series, it had one thing beyond dispute: It was fun.

The set-up in "Arrival," the premiere episode, is straightforward. McGoohan, as a British secret agent, quits his job in a fit of righteous anger, and all of a sudden he finds himself in the Village, a well-guarded complex where the inhabitants are known by number rather than name. A man called Number Two introduces himself and makes it clear that he is an authority figure of some kind and that he wants information. Over the course of the episode—and the 16 that followed—the Prisoner resists attempts to extract information and continuously tries to flee the Village. "Tell us what we want to know and this can be a very nice place," Number Two says. But the Prisoner will not sell himself out.

Marketed by the show's production company as an episodic James Bond, *The Prisoner* proved a mystery to viewers expecting sleazy gadgets and braless babes, and it took a swift ratings plunge shortly after it debuted. Ever since, hardcore fans have cried rivers over the show's abbreviated life span, even though it was never meant to be a franchise. Early episodes like "Arrival" and "The Chimes of Big Ben" take us down intriguing narrative alleys, but by the series-ending "Fall Out," in which our reluctant hero seems to discover that the Village is a figment of his imagination, the show has spiraled into pretentious "Know Thyself" sermonizing. The Prisoner, unlike many television heroes, knew when to make his escape. —*D P*

Where No Man Has Gone Before

Star Trek (1966)

Where No Man Has Gone Before isn't the *Star Trek* episode to watch if you're looking for pure nostalgia. There's no "Space, the final frontier..." opening narration. There's no Dr. McCoy to cock his eyebrow and growl about doing the human thing. There's no multi-colored uniforms or mini-skirted space chicks. The characters and performances still have lots of rough edges.

It's because of all that—not in spite of it—that "Where No Man Has Gone Before" remains the most interesting episode of the classic series. As fun as it might be to watch "The Trouble with Tribbles" or "The Doomsday Machine" again, such episodes fit so snugly into the fondly remembered mythos of the show that it's impossible to judge them as anything other than *Trek*. Have these episodes dated well over the years? Do they still stand up on their own? Who can say? It's *Star Trek*. You either love it or you don't.

"Where No Man Has Gone Before" is a different story. As every red- (or green-) blooded Trekker will tell you, it was the second pilot for the show (and the first to feature William Shatner's James T. Kirk

wear pants, why Spock shouts all the time for no apparent reason ("Sensors on!"), why Sulu isn't at the helm and why DeForest Kelley is nowhere in sight. The Enterprise isn't the same homey place we would come to know so well. The episode can't merely coast on our sentimental attachment to the show. It has to work as a story.

And it does. True, the plot seems a bit pulpy by today's standards: After the Enterprise tries to break through a mysterious "energy barrier" that surrounds our galaxy, a crewman develops frightening mental abilities that make him a menace to the ship, and possibly mankind. But the real drama of the episode comes from the dilemma faced by Capt. Kirk. The crew member in question is an old friend. Should Kirk maroon or even kill the man, as Mr. Spock suggests?

It's the classic heart-versus-head debate that *Trek*—in all its incarnations—would [illegible]

next three decades. Yet it has special power in "Where No Man Has Gone Before" because it doesn't feel like a simple disagreement between friends. This Spock guy is *cold* in a way he never would be again: Television has a way of rubbing the edges off characters the longer they're around, and Mr. Spock would soon become more of a groovy pacifist who would never advocate killing a man because he might pose a threat to the ship. But in "Where No Man Has Gone Before," he's still truly alien, and how the oh-so-human Capt. Kirk deals with him is still fascinating after all these years.—*S.H.*

Episode on the Edge

We've raised shields and deflectors. We've armed the photon torpedoes. We've put the mail room on full alert.

Why are we girding ourselves for battle? Because we've put together a list of the 10 coolest TV episodes in sci-fi history, and "The City on the Edge of Forever" isn't on it.

It's perennially poised atop the lists of all-time favorite *Star Trek* episodes. It was written (well, the first draft, anyway) by science-fiction legend Harlan Ellison. And, yes, it's a very good show.

But it's not *that* good.

More specifically, it hasn't stood the test of time as well as some episodes. It's not the giant, time-warping doughnut that's the problem. We don't hold budget constraints against any show. And it's not William Shatner's eccentric performance or the extraordinarily lame way in which Spock and Kirk take down a nosy cop. (They employ a weak variation of "Your shoes are untied...made you look!")

Here's the real reason "The City on the Edge of Forever" is hard to buy 30 years later: How could Capt. Kirk fall in love with that dippy Edith Keeler? And so quickly, too?

A quick refresher for non-Trekkers: A stoned Dr. McCoy jumps through the Time Bagel and ends up in Depression-era New York. Kirk and Spock have to go back and stop him from changing history. But to do so they have to let goody-two-shoes Edith Keeler (Joan Collins) get run over by a truck. Complications arise when Kirk falls head over boot-heels in love with the doomed social worker.

This is a bit hard to swallow since Kirk is swooning with undying devotion after only the most innocuous exchanges with Keeler. And it's doubly improbable that a testosterone-charged he-man like the captain would go for a woman who subjects homeless people to sappy speeches about the future.

"One day soon man is going to be able to harness incredible energies, maybe even the atom—energies that could one day hurl us to other worlds in some sort of spaceship," Keeler tells the slack-jawed bums in her soup kitchen. They roll their eyes and keep shoveling gruel into their mouths. Kirk, on the other hand, is smitten.

We don't buy it.—*S.H.*

The Inner Light

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1992)

Jean-Luc Picard never had it so good.

Over the course of seven years at the helm of the U.S.S. Enterprise, the stoic captain brooded at times over the life not lived. He knew great adventure and had found himself at many of the pivotal events of galactic history, but his duty-bound life through the cosmos left little time for the smaller pleasures of life.

In "The Inner Light," Picard gets to experience what he missed, thanks to a space probe whose beam penetrates the ship's shields and locks onto the captain. In a flash Picard finds himself on the desert planet Kataan, where everyone knows him as Kamin, an iron weaver, dutiful husband and respected member of the small community that eeks out a living from the parched soil. As Dr. Crusher and the crew back on the Enterprise desperately attempt to release the captain from the probe's grasp, Picard lives a lifetime on the dying, unknown planet.

This is a simple episode. It wasn't a turning point, like 1990's rousing "Best of Both Worlds," which brought the Borg into conflict with the Federation and finally allowed *TNG* to break free of the shackles of the original series. "The Inner Light" instead had both smaller and larger [illegible] aims.

the usually untapped potential of science fiction, utilizing the conventions of the genre to flesh out a real man in a real place, and all the hopes and dreams and disappointments that are common to us all. Through Patrick Stewart's subtle portrayal and the thoughtful writing of Morgan Gendel and Peter Allan Fields, we see Jean-Luc Picard not just as a mythic space hero but as an Everyman, too—just like you and me, with the same ordinary pressures and fears and needs. Great space battles and strange alien creatures make for entertaining television, but they are not requirements for dramatic impact. The story of a simple iron weaver, frustrated in his ambitions, loved by his family, is more than enough to keep us riveted to our seats.—*D.P.*

Eye of the Beholder

The Twilight Zone (1960)

At its core, "Eye of the Beholder" is a gimmick, an obvious assumption based on a tired aphorism. Taken alone, even Rod Serling's final commentary rings true: "The old saying happens to be true. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In this year or a hundred years hence, on this planet or wherever there is human life, perhaps out amongst the stars."

Yet somehow this commonplace, stale idea not only transformed itself into the coolest *Twilight Zone* installment in a series stuffed with cool moments, but it also became a pop-culture landmark. Almost any casual TV viewer can identify the episode, if not by name then by premise—just mention the pretty girl and the pig-like doctors who think she's ugly and people immediately know what you're talking about. After all, how many 37-year-old black-and-white, sci-fi/fantasy shows score parodies on the terminally trendy *Saturday Night Live*? Well, at least one—last season *SNL* spoofed the episode by featuring Pamela Anderson Lee as the comely patient, who in this case triggered a lusty response from her misshapen surgeons.

Of course, "Eye of the Beholder" is more than fodder for a late-night comedy program. The episode helped *The Twilight Zone* legitimate science fiction/fantasy television—until then, the genre was known for *Space Patrol*, *Captain Video* and other kiddie shows. Airing on November 11, 1960, the episode came early in the anthology's second season and epitomized the reason for *The Twilight Zone*'s break-out success. Instead of spacey kid's stuff, it brought sci-fi down to earth, thus making it more eerie, thought-provoking and real. We could easily see ourselves in that fifth dimension, relating to both the grotesque doctors and the beautiful, tortured Janet Tyler.

Strong acting and direction also helped set the series apart. "Eye of the Beholder" only works because a possibly clumsy gimmick—no one's face is seen until the very end—is pulled off gracefully. This trick could have rendered the final punchline annoyingly obvious, but the technique quickly becomes imperceptible, thanks to Douglas Heyes' slick direction (particularly in the suspenseful scene where Tyler's bandages are painstakingly removed) and Maxine Stuart's nuanced and impassioned vocal performance as Janet (once the bandages come off, she's played by future Beverly Hillbilly Donna Douglas).

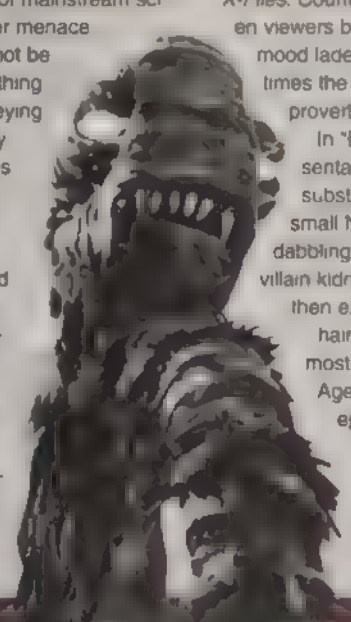
"Eye of the Beholder" is a milestone of science-fiction cool thanks to its utter simplicity. Today, when science fiction is synonymous with flashy special effects, this episode still weaves a spell by what it *doesn't* show.—*Annabelle Villanueva*

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

SCARE TACTICS

Lying somewhere in the nebulous territory just outside the boundaries of mainstream science fiction, a darker menace lurks. Something that cannot be rationally explained, something that threatens those journeying into the unknown. An entity that assumes many shapes and will never necessarily choose the same guise twice—the horror genre.

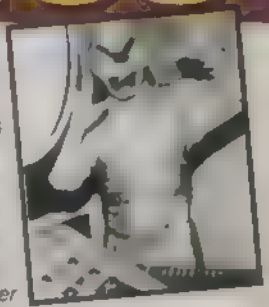
Uniting the fantastic and the hornfic is a device frequently employed in television sci-fi. Horror gives its sister genre an edge, reminding fans that rational explanations cannot account for every phenomenon they might encounter.



Perhaps the best-known example of a sci-fi/horror hybrid is *The X-Files*. Countless episodes of the show frighten viewers by carefully cultivating a dark mood laden with suspense, although sometimes the subject matter alone can send proverbial chills down a viewer's spine.

In "Die Hand Die Verletzt," a representative of the devil, disguised as a substitute teacher, is summoned to a small New England town by parents dabbling in the occult. In "Irresistible," a villain kidnaps and murders young women, then exhumes the corpses to get the hair and fingernails. "What scares us most is that which is most familiar," Agent Mulder says at the end of the episode. "The boy next door could grow up to be the devil in a button-down shirt."

If horror is compelling because it is so familiar, it is equally so when the threat is posed by an "other," something monstrous or simply alien that can be vilified because it differs from the norm. *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* brought vampires, zombies and witches to the fore. *The Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone* told stories about characters who inhabited the uncharted waters of paranoia and madness.



Horror ensures that the quest for rational explanation continues, inspiring voyagers to search beyond the waking world for answers to the mysteries that haunt them. It is, ultimately, the essential counterpart to science fiction. One is about facing the unknown of the future, the other is about facing the unknown within ourselves.—*Gina McIntyre*

Trials and Tribble-ations

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1996)

Whatever you may think of William Shatner's skills as a thespian, there is one fact that is undeniable: as Capt James T. Kirk, the man is just *so cool*. And since the gritty, confrontational *Deep Space Nine* is the true successor to the original series (at least for most hardcore Trekkers), it's wonderfully appropriate—and a lot of fun—to bring together the original cast and *DS9*'s

Utilizing so-called *Forrest Gump* technology, "Trials and Tribble-ations" takes Capt. Benjamin Sisko and the crew of the Defiant backwards in time to the classic "Trouble With Tribbles" episode of *Star Trek*. Their mission: stop an assassination attempt on Capt.

Kirk. To be sure, it's not *DS9*'s best script, but that doesn't matter. This is intended as a romp, and as such it is a rousing success. It both parodies and honors the original series without going too far in either direction.

Of course, the episode is loaded with in-jokes for old-school Trekkers. Bashir and O'Brien get to mix it up in the original episode's famous bar fight; there's an explanation for why, after Kirk is buried in tribbles, the creatures keep dropping on his head one at a time (Sisko and Dax are in the storage compartment above the captain, tossing tribbles aside while looking for a bomb); Dax admits to an affair with Dr. McCoy; and Sisko meets his hero, Capt. Kirk.

That final interaction captures all the bittersweet nostalgia of the whole series-combining enterprise. Sisko is standing in for all the fans who wish they, too, could be transported back in time to the days when James T. Kirk swaggered across the bridge in his prime. It's a terrific moment—and more fun than all of the sequences of Kirk and Picard together in *Star Trek: Generations*. —E.G.

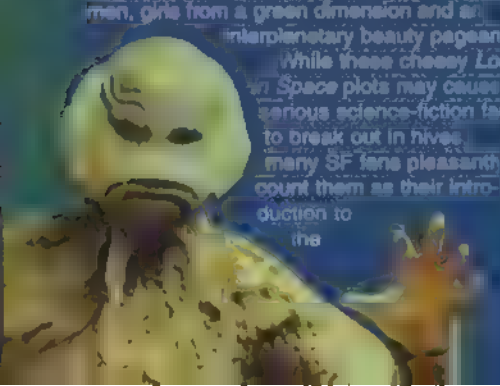
SPACE CAMP

Science fiction television is a vast tableau full of broad visions, distant worlds, complex technology, piercing human insights and giant talking carrots. That's right—huge, orange, garrulous veggies. Plus intergalactic circuses, interstellar hillbillies, cosmic hippies, celestial department stores and space vikings. Not to mention anti-matter men, girls from a green dimension and an interplanetary beauty pageant.

While these cheesy *Lost in Space* plots may cause serious science-fiction fans to break out in hives, many SF fans pleasantly count them as their introduction to the genre. And while most fans do want their sci-fi TV liberally sprinkled with social relevance and scientific accuracy, sci-fi camp also has managed to elbow its way into viewers' hearts.

Take *Lost in Space*, for example. Created by Irwin Allen, the show became the zenith of camp, quickly abandoning its early, semi-serious themes for episodes called "The Great Vegetable Rebellion" and "One of Our Dogs is Missing." Today, the show's reruns thrive on the Sci-Fi Channel and Hollywood is poised to release a big-screen adaptation (sans the kitsch) starring William Hurt and Gary Oldman.

Allen's other television forays also have left their legacy—1966's *The Time Tunnel* has been called a precursor to *Quantum Leap*, while *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* first set the stage for underwater stories like *The Abyss* and *SeaQuest DSV*. And *Land of the Giants* was just, well, gloriously awful.



Camp became so popular, in fact, that some shows like *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* strove for kitsch, playing themselves for laughs that just weren't there. Others have been more successful—*Dr. Who* retained its cheesy silliness even after it became apparent that most of its audience were adults and not the originally targeted children, while *The X-Files*' hilarious in-joke crammed send-up of itself, "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" became one of the series' best episodes. Which just goes to show that even in the lofty world of science fiction, sometimes bad is better after all. —A.V.

City of Death

Doctor Who (1979)

It looked like a children's show. *A cheap* children's show. In fact, it *was* a cheap children's show. And yet *Doctor Who* managed to capture the hearts and imaginations of adults around the world, much to the befuddlement of viewers immune to its eccentric charms.

The "City of Death" storyline, broadcast in four parts in September and October of 1979, best captured the unique blend of cheese and wit that graced the series during its late '70s to mid-'80s heyday. The Doctor—a brilliant yet often childish "Timelord" who gads about the universe in a stolen time machine—decides to visit Paris for a little vacation from galactic problem-solving. But his holiday is interrupted by a broccoli-headed alien's insidious plan to change the past and wipe out the human race before it can be born.

Yes, the sets had a tendency to wobble whenever anyone closed a door. Yes, the special effects looked like they were produced by a high school audio-visual club. Yes, if you looked closely at the vegetable-monster mask you could see the actor's face beneath.

But *Doctor Who* was never about slick surfaces. The best episodes rose above the camp trappings of low-budget sci-fi by virtue of charismatic leads and clever scripts. The Doctor was played by seven actors during the show's 26-year BBC run. Tom Baker, the fourth and most engagingly hammy, was the star of "City of Death." Although begun by writer David Fisher and credited to a "David Agnew"—actually a BBC pseudonym—the script was heavily rewritten by series story editor Douglas Adams, who had already won some measure of fame and fortune as the creator of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Adams' daffy word-play was perfectly suited to the ever-unpredictable Doctor and his droll sidekick, Romana (played by Baker's future wife, Lala Ward).

Romana: Where are we going?

Doctor: Are you talking philosophically or geographically?

Romana: Philosophically.

Doctor: Then we're going to lunch.

Though Adams, Ward and Baker all left *Doctor Who* not long after "City of Death," the series continued for another 10 years, occasionally rising to the same screwball heights. But a 1996 Fox/BBC attempt to revive the show was a disappointing misfire. The sets didn't wobble. The special effects were passable. The silly monsters were nowhere in sight. But the magical, mercurial "Damn the budget, full speed ahead" charm of the original was missing, too.—*S.H.*

The Long Twilight Struggle

Babylon 5 (1995)

According to John F. Kennedy, the "long twilight struggle" is one against "the common enemies of man—tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself." Sardonic television fans could add another foe to that list: the flimsy character development that typically plagues TV series.

O.K., so one-dimensional personae are not as bad as despotism or dysentery epidemics. But there's no denying that they are annoying. And that's why *Babylon 5* is so refreshing—the series' serialized, five-year story arc allows for emotional maneuvering, giving its characters more depth and space to—*gasp!*—actually change. Of course, being part of a greater fabric means individual episodes lose something when removed from their larger context; selecting one *B5* installment over another kind of misses the point. Still, "The Long Twilight Struggle" manages to highlight *B5*'s coolest attributes while standing strongly on its own merits. After all, how many television hours manage to touch intelligently on issues like war, genocide, moral responsibility, personal tragedy, political power struggles and the evils of totalitarian governments—all while leaving 10 minutes free for commercial breaks?

At the center of the episode is Centauri ambassador Londo Mollari. When the series debuted, Londo's comportment mirrored his planet's crumbling decline. He'd become a spoiled, dissolute and frequently drunk cynic a far cry from his youth, when he glittered as one of the empire's great war heroes. As "The Long Twilight Struggle" opens, Londo's lofty status is being restored after his assistance aiding the Centauri/Shadows alliance.

But Londo's not sure he's done the right thing. As the Centauri ready to launch an attack against their arch-enemies, the Narn, Londo is hesitant. "I feel that things are moving too quickly," he insists. Already saddened that his machinations resulted in the death of a friend, he begins to understand that he's actually being used by his "allies"; his egomaniacal grabs for prestige may have backfired. As such, the episode lays the foundation for Londo's future growth. And, just as interesting, it also portrays a textured, complex emotional gray area: an intelligent and compelling ambiguity rarely seen on television. —*V.V.*

SCHLOCK TREATMENT

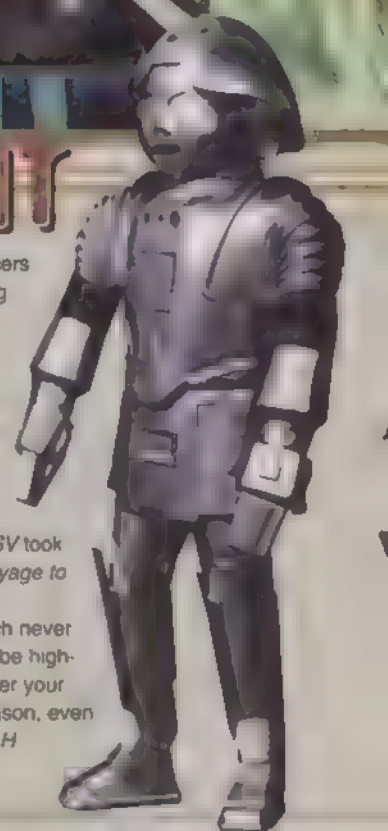
Every sci-fi fan who lived through the '70s remembers it. For them, the worst sounds imaginable—the crunch of breaking bones, the screech of nails on a chalkboard—are sweet music by comparison. It haunts their days. It echoes in their nightmares. It is the sound of doom.

"Bee-dee bee-dee bee-dee. Nice shootin', Buck!"

Nothing captures the sheer idiocy of TV sci-fi at its brain-draining worst than the voice of Twiki the robot. For two long seasons, the insufferable 'droid zoomed through the universe as the official comic-relief sidekick on *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (1979-1981). Looking like a cross between a lightsaber and a mantal aid, Twiki followed Buck (Gil Gerard) through every one of his lame-brained adventures. It was almost enough to make producer Glen A. Larson's other sci-fi series of the time, *Battlestar Galactica*, look classy by comparison. *Almost.*

Though he also has *Knight Rider* and *Manimal* on his list of crimes against mankind, Larson can't be blamed for all of TV's worst SF outings. Plenty of television producers have taken a wild stab at the genre without having the slightest idea what makes it tick. Though Ben Roberts and Ivan Goff—the creators of *Charlie's Angels*—cheerfully admitted to a complete ignorance of SF, they launched an awful *Logan's Run* show in 1977. That same year, the equally dopey *Man from Atlantis* sank quickly. In the early '80s *V* kept the bad sci-fi tradition alive by portraying an alien invasion with all the emotional impact of an *A-Team* episode. A decade later, *seaQuest DSV* took up the mantle with scripts so awful they made *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* look like *Moby Dick*.

Maybe it's unfair to pick on shows like *V*, which never had much network support. It's got to be hard to be high-minded when the threat of cancellation hangs over your show like a cloud. After all, by its dismal final season, even *Star Trek* had "Spock's Brain" to answer for. —*S.H.*



Truly Unique Collectibles

MOVIES • TV • MUSIC • SCI-FI • SPORTS • MODELS

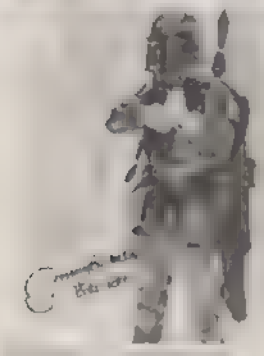
Toys, Figures & Collectibles

Color 8" x 10" Framed Photos

Only $10.95 ea

Specify Walnut or Black Wood Frame. Photos without Frames are available for $5.00 each. Over 5,000 different images available from Movies, TV Music, Sports, Supermodels & More!!

Hand Signed 8" x 10" Color Photos



All of our hand signed celebrity photos are in full color and 8" x 10" in size. Each signed piece is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity with a lifetime money back guarantee. Hundred's of other stars available from Film, Music & TV

Original Movie One Sheet Posters

Truly Unique Collectibles

MOVIES • TV • MUSIC • SCI-FI • SPORTS • MODELS

Call
Or
Write For A
FREE
Color
Catalog

Orders (Mon-Sat 10-8, Sun 10-6): 1-888-725-7614
Customer Service: (914) 348-8775
24 Hour Fax Line: (914) 348-6370
We Accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover & American Express Cards

Visit Our Retail Gallery At
85 Main St., Nyack, NY 10960

Satisfaction Guaranteed • 14 Day Return Policy • All Prices Subject to Change • NY Residents Add Sales Tax • Allow 2 Weeks For Delivery

Send Check Or Money Order in U.S. Funds Only. Truly Unique Collectibles D-CS 85 Main St. Nyack, NY 10960. Add appropriate shipping

Shipping & Handling Charges (UPS)

Framed 8x10 Photos, Poster, Calendar, Toy
$5.95 & Under = $1.25 for ea. additional item (US or Canada)
Signed 8x10 Photo: $4.50 (US) & 8.50 (Canada) +$1.25 for ea. item

10

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (1981)

A lot of great thinkers have pondered nihilism, but it took Douglas Adams to make it funny.

At the tender age of 26, Adams created *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* for BBC radio. Ostensibly a wild and wacky sci-fi spoof, the series (which later became both a series of books and a TV miniseries) actually probed deeper into the relationship between science and meaning than many "serious" SF works. The conclusion Adams reached—that no matter how much knowledge we may accrue, true wisdom will forever be beyond us—might seem bleak, but his gift for twisted logic and witty asides made the journey to despair a hilarious one.

The story opens, appropriately enough, with the destruction of the Earth. It's not some Ming the Merciless-style despot who blows the planet to smithereens. It's a race of officious bureaucrats who are building "a hyper-space bypass" through our solar system. They have nothing against the Earth. It just gets in the way.

One human survives the holocaust, but again he doesn't fit the Flash Gordon archetype. Instead, it's milquetoasty Arthur Dent (played both on radio and television by Simon Jones), who doesn't even have time to change out of his bathrobe and slippers before he's whisked off the planet. His savior is Ford Prefect (David Dixon), an old chum who turns out to be an alien visiting the Earth to conduct research for the most popular reference book in existence—*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Through sheer coincidence and amazing luck (much of it bad), Arthur and Ford manage to uncover some of the universe's greatest secrets, that white mice are the most intelligent beings in the cosmos, that the Earth was created as part of their grand scheme to discover the meaning of life, that mankind's descendants are actually hairdressers, movie producers and marketing directors exiled from another planet.

By the fifth installment of the six-episode series (broadcast on the BBC in 1981), Ford and Arthur have stumbled into Milliway's. Known as "the Restaurant at the End of the Universe," it's a kind of intergalactic Hard Rock Cafe, hovering in a "time bubble" at the exact moment the universe contracts back into the quantum singularity from which it exploded billions of years before. Celebrities and tourists travel from the past to down a few drinks and enjoy the floorshow—the complete destruction of all existence. The very idea turns life, the universe and everything into the ultimate useless joke. But fortunately, in Adams' capable hands, it turns out to be one of the best jokes science fiction ever told.—*S H*

SUBSCRIBE!

GET
6 BI-MONTHLY ISSUES

PLUS
3 SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUES

FOR ONLY
$24.95

This coupon is your express ticket to special savings on a subscription to the only full-color insider magazine for science fiction and action-adventure movies. Save big bucks all year and get the first word on the hottest new movies, TV shows and more!

Yes! *Send me one year of the New Cinescape. I'll get 6 bi-monthly issues and at least 3 special double issues delivered to my door (Special issues single-copy price: $9.95.) Almost a $60 newsstand value for just $24.95!*
Send check or money order to Cinescape Magazine, P.O. Box 805, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0605
or call (800) 342-3592

☐ PAYMENT ENCLOSED $24.95

☐ BILL ME LATER $24.95

☐ SAVE EVEN MORE! TWO YEARS $44.95

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

E-MAIL ADDRESS

Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of the first issue. Enclose US funds only. Canada & Mex. add $12 per year. International Rates $75 per year

007 JOINS THE

COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION

IN THE LATEST UPDATING OF THE

SUPER-AGENT FRANCHISE

BOND VS. THE MEDIA BARON

It seemed only too appropriate

As the cast and crew of the 18th James Bond film, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, sweated out long hours and seven-day work weeks to make the film's December 18th release date, they faced a pack of reporters that smelled blood in the water. It's been reported that the first cut shown to preview audiences was an incoherent mishmash. That the script had been tossed out shortly after shooting began. That director Roger Spottiswoode was indecisive on the set, that the stars weren't talking to each other, that Teri Hatcher had been cut from the film, that the budget was spiraling out of control

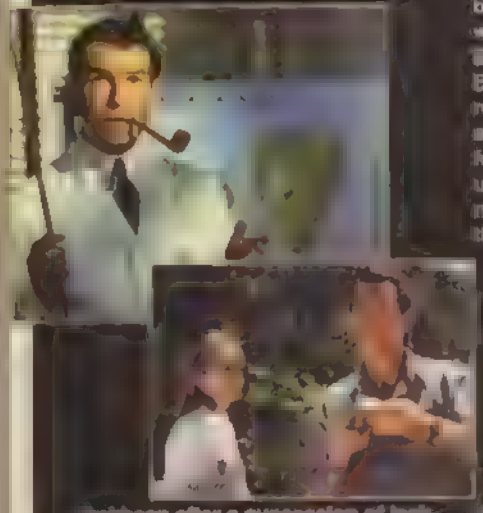
"Trust me," says Spottiswoode with a sigh, "we recognized the irony."

Tomorrow Never Dies, you see, is about a powerful media baron manipu-

tomorrow

STAR POWER

Does Pierce Brosnan have the muscle to reinvent James Bond?



Pierce Brosnan may be James Bond on screen, but a more appropriate appellation would be Goldfinger.

Brosnan has told the Wales [illegible] recently. In the early '90s, the James Bond franchise was headed for the [illegible] junkheap after a succession of lackluster entries—until Brosnan stepped up. *GoldenEye*, his first outing as 007, became one of the biggest international successes of 1995.

No one, least of all Brosnan, could have anticipated his sudden popularity thereafter. The actor, who had been best known for the hokey '80s TV show *Remington Steele* before his big break, leaped from *GoldenEye* to a goofy comic turn in Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* and then to the lead role in *Dante's Peak*, a surprising box-office success for which he collected an A-list-worthy $5 million paycheck. Next up is Richard Attenborough's *Grey Owl* and then the remake of The *Thomas Crown Affair* before returning to James Bond.

"Life has changed enormously," Brosnan says with a smile. "It's moving very, very fast, which is both a good and a bad thing. When you have a success, you can't sit on it too long, you just have to keep working. Having been an actor for 20-odd years, I admit I adore this. Suddenly everything seems doable."

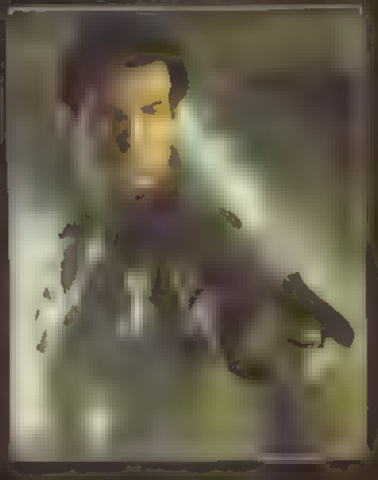
Chief on the list of doable things is rehabilitating the James Bond mythos, a battle he's been waging with the franchise's producers since *GoldenEye*, with limited success. "I'd love to really shake up the formula," he says, "but the producers would be terrified to do so. I see no reason why we couldn't do different genre Bonds—a thriller Bond, a scary Bond, a science-fiction Bond, a horror Bond. It can be done. Just my saying this out loud will be enough for the producers to say, 'Lock him up, put him in the jacket.' But why not? You have all the tools there—the character, the women, the gadgets. Just put all that in a setting which is very different."

Like what?

"Like *Casino Royale* [the Ian Fleming novel that was made into a film parody in the late '60s]; that would be wonderful," he says. "And there's no reason not to go after some of the big directors. Martin Scorsese said he would love to do one. Can you imagine that?"

Brosnan paused.

"Of course, whether or not any of this comes to fruition remains to be seen. Next time is a long time away. This time it's *Tomorrow Never Dies*, which has gone so far so good. One's always waiting for the other punch, though. I refuse to take anything for granted."—*M.F.*



[illegible] to create [illegible] to keep [illegible] to the [illegible] Interest to readers to [illegible] set to this [illegible] or invitations [illegible] covers to with their stories were not evil. We [illegible] our sources we [illegible] to check [illegible] it and [illegible].

Spitzer [illegible] [illegible] to suspect [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

whacked-out media baron Elliot Carver wouldn't be believable.

007 himself, Pierce Brosnan, couldn't agree more. Considering what the media has done recently, the pain and mangling of lives, I think the movie is timely.

Which is not say, Brosnan admits, that the press got it *all* wrong about the $85 million picture. "These movies are tough," he says. "And when you're dealing with that kind of pressure, people either rise to the occasion or they fall. In this case, the script was a problem, and everybody rose to the occasion. Scenes that may have been three pages long and full of a lot of extraneous dialogue became one and a half pages of very tight, lean dialogue that had much more bite to them. Roger Spottiswoode was very open and sharing with the film and was excited about it. A lot of people weren't

"IF YOU DON'T INVESTIGATE A SCRIPT, EXPLORE IT, TEAR IT APART, REBUILD IT AND SORT OF PUNCH IT AROUND UNTIL IT'S WORKING, YOU'RE A FOOL."
--DIRECTOR ROGER SPOTTISWOODE

quite sure what was going on, they weren't quite sure if the style or look of the film was going to work. But about six or seven weeks into it, after we began to see cut footage, we realized there was something happening that was very exciting. Ultimately, we got a very streamlined story, a great baddie and a very timely piece dealing with the media powerhouses Ted Turner, Rupert Murdoch and the late Robert Maxwell—with the divergence from reality being that Carver has psychotic tendencies and is willing to trigger a nuclear war between England and China to achieve his ends.

Seem a tad far out? Not so, says Spottiswoode, who has directed films such as *Under Fire* and HBO's *And the Band Played On*. "Ted Turner didn't start the Gulf War," reassures the director, "but the Gulf War undeniably helped CNN. His network had been there for five years, but nobody was watching. It was *made* by the

That great "baddie" is Jonathan Pryce, who plays Carver, a media mogul determined to do *anything* to boost the circulation of his global newspaper and the ratings of his satellite news networks. The character was modeled on real-life media

the Bond series, which started during the Cold War, possibly Bond ongoing, must be continued. "[*GoldenEye*] would be the last movie."

Could Bond, the original secret agent of the Royal Navy, survive the end of the Cold War? Could the series keep pace with fast-changing headlines? And the ever-demanding audience? Broccoli, producer of the Bond films, was determined that they would be part of the future of the world had changed, but Bond hadn't.

they do it again? Shortly after discussion began about *GoldenEye*'s follow-up Fierstein saw a CNN report on the war in the former Yugoslavia.

"While I was watching [the report] I remembered *Citizen Kane* and what Charles Foster Kane said: 'Send me the pictures, I'll provide the war.'" James Bond had his new villain.

For such a scenario to work, casting had to be spot-on—and Spottiswoode and the producers rejoiced when Jonathan Pryce

political and economic threat to the world, and the source of information. Elliot Carver points out this danger of putting the power in one man's hands. He was perfect to take over his predecessor's role. Bond. My scene with Pierce are [illegible] as they are funny to just say the words. So Mr. Bond. It's not [illegible] the interview. Look at the film and [illegible] they're watching a Bond film but they also might think they're watching a political thriller or any other kind of

MGM's press release [illegible] Pryce's role as "[illegible] of one of the great film franchise the longevity that has series has forever. You can't [illegible] and not [illegible] people [illegible] to the theater [illegible] offer something new that [illegible] new audience while [illegible] to the existing enthusiasts."

And they pulled it off with *GoldenEye* grossing over $350 million at the worldwide box office. But with Hollywood [illegible] about the next Bond movie, the question was: Could

agreed to come aboard.

"Jonathan has really brought Elliot Carver alive," says producer Michael Wilson. "He made him an intriguing character, part showman, part villain. It's not something every actor can do, but we knew he could pull it off."

Pryce, a Tony Award-winner whose films appeared in such films as *Evita*, *The Age of Innocence* and *Character Glen Ross*, says he was attracted to the project almost as soon as he cracked open the script. "It was a very good part," he says. "The character is based on some kind of truth, not any

thriller. The look of the [illegible] extremely important [illegible] scenes certainly up to date [illegible] extremely important [illegible] these scenes."

Not up to date is Bond's ally. While the first few films have danced around the [illegible] of [illegible] capable women, invariably he has had to save them from danger. [illegible] however [illegible] work side by side [illegible] Chinese agent Wai Lin [illegible] to depend on.

Basically, it's a continuation of updating Bond for the [illegible] instead. This time we have [illegible] intelligent, feisty

capable secret agent who teams up with James Bond. It is yet one more way of continuing along the path of Bond facing the new world.

Playing Wai Lin is Hong Kong actress Michelle Yeoh, well known and loved as an action heroine throughout Asia and among Quentin Tarantino's clique of video obsessives. MGM, however, wasn't so sure she was right for the role.

"In my mind, it was never a risk," says Wilson, who championed her casting with the suits. "In the mind of some of the people on the film and some of the people who had to market the picture, the attitude was that Michelle would help us in the Far East but she's kind of unknown in the West. But I really think her performance is going to be so endearing to the public that she's going to be a star here too. The people who have seen the picture are just so knocked out by her."

More recognizable to Western viewers is Teri Hatcher, who plays the film's other primary female role, Carver's wife Paris who—believe it or not—once had an affair with Bond.

The character was made to order for Brosnan, who'd asked that Bond's love interest be someone with whom the secret agent had a past, someone emotionally meaningful to him rather than just someone he meets and picks up at the beginning of the film. "They wrote it specifically for me, and it came in the package of Teri Hatcher," Brosnan says with approval. "She is a woman that Bond really loved at one time but she just got too close too soon, and he got scared and left. He bailed out. There's an emotional chord there that has a certain resonance throughout the piece, which is good. It's something I would like to see more of if we go again on a third film."

Which MGM would be pleased to do—if *Tomorrow* connects with audiences. "I want the film to be more successful than *GoldenEye*," Brosnan says, "but I cannot take on the responsibility of the studio or anyone's job at that studio [about the future of the franchise]. We do have competition in *Titanic*. That's the big one sitting opposite us. Two different films altogether, two different audiences, but you cannot underestimate *Titanic* or a filmmaker like James Cameron.

"I want this Bond to hold its own against that," he continues. "We've made a really fine film that's going to look like no other James Bond film you've ever seen. It's got pace, energy, wall-to-wall action and just enough character work and romance to carry it through. But of course they've thought that before. With a film like this, you just have to throw the dice and see what happens." ◆

Look out! YEOH!

Traditionalists may not like

Hunched down in their La-Z-Boys, one hand around a beer, the other one clutching the VCR remote, they happily hit the pause button as Ursula Andress, wearing two Post-It notes for a bikini, jiggles along the beach in *Dr. No*—an eyeful for the villain, but nothing for him to worry about.

To be sure, Yeoh looks good in a bathing suit, but in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, in which she's the latest in a long line of so-called "Bond Babes," she won't be cowering behind the heroic 007. She'll be leading the charge.

The Hong Kong actress, a major star in Asia, has scored an impressive reputation for butt-kicking heroics in such action fare as *Magnificent Warriors* and Jackie Chan's *Police Story III: Supercop*. Now, with *Tomorrow Never Dies*, she's looking to follow in the footsteps of her friend Chan by crossing over to American stardom.

"Some things are the same," she says, comparing Hollywood filmmaking to the smaller-budgeted Hong Kong fare. "The pressure. Whatever the budget, the goal is still the same."

The biggest culture shock for Yeoh is getting used to seeing these strange creatures walking around called *stunt people*. In Hong Kong, as Chan has proclaimed from every mountain top in the free world, the stars do their own stunts—and they either get them right or end up in an ambulance.

Safety measures are taken a lot more seriously here, Yeoh admits. "You have a lot more special effects that we do not have the luxury of in Hong Kong. At the end of the day, I keep saying to myself, 'This is what it should be about.' It is about making a movie, you shouldn't be out there risking your life for it. When a stunt is done in the Bond movie, it's all preplanned. In Hong Kong, you would probably be the first one to do it. That's a big difference."—*E.G.*

Millennial fever has swept Hollywood, and Kevin Costner delivers the goods in the apocalyptic thriller *The Postman*

By Beth Laski

Kevin Costner is on the road to Gomorrah again—and he couldn't be happier.

"You usually don't really explain what you're doing in your life other than the very simplistic idea of, 'I liked it, and I wanted to share it,'" says Costner, whose post-apocalyptic epic *The Postman* reaches theaters this month. "I very rarely see the symbol or hidden meaning in anything that I do, or the metaphor of what my work is. In terms of messages or anything like that, I've never been smart enough or interested enough to try to lay them in. I just do what interests me."

Maybe so, but the actor-director, whose previous foray into a dystopian future was the mega-budgeted *Waterworld*, knows what works at the box office. And in recent years, no subgenre has had as much cache as the post-apocalyptic epic.

"When you have something that is a huge success like George Miller's *Mad Max*, then all of a sudden there's a slew of people who say, 'Wow! This is what audiences want,'" says Richard Murphy of Jean-Claude Van Damme's Long Road Productions. "Then there's a flop and everyone latches on to the next fad."

That's certainly the conventional model the accountants use, but when it comes to the destruction of civilization, Hollywood just can't get enough—even if it

ping
Postal

HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER: Kevin Costner, with help from film newcomer

has to weather a few flops now and again.

The first wave of apocalyptic films came in the decade after the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended World War II. Suburbanites built bomb shelters in their backyards, school children learned to duck and roll, and teens went to drive-ins to see films like *Five*, *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* and *The Last Woman on Earth*. But the [illegible] post-apocalyptic [illegible] and Khrushchev, but instead of Reagan and Gorbachev. Even the destruction of what Reagan called the "evil empire" didn't kill the irradiated g[illegible].

Certainly the initial post-apocalyptic films had a lot to do with the horror of bombs," says *Variety* film critic Leonard Klady. "Now, most post-apocalyptic films are about ecological concerns."

The shift has been a conscious one, playing upon people's seeming need to worry about possibilities that are beyond their control. "In 1985 when [novelist] David Brin wrote *The Postman*, the nature of the apocalypse was nuclear," recalls the film's producer, Steve Tisch, best known for the Oscar-winning *Forrest Gump*. "Twelve years later, that's really not a feasible story line, so we changed it from nuclear to environmental, and now in the movie there's a reference to the Second Civil War, which I think not only is topical but is an idea, what with militia groups and the like, that audiences will understand and be somewhat frightened of in terms of its credibility and its potential to happen in our lifetimes."

In short, the film may fall into the increasingly broad category of "science fiction," but as *Postman* producer Jim Wilson says, "Although [the movie is set] in the future, it's not highly futuristic in any way. If people come to the film to see the Jetsons or something sci-fi like that, it's not what they'll get."

What they'll get is the latest heavily hyped post-apocalyptic adventure, which industry insiders will be watching closely as a bellwether for the health of the subgenre in the post-Cold War era. The film, the first big-budget picture of its kind since Costner's *Waterworld*, is similar in concept to *Mad Max*, *Waterworld* and innumerable Westerns, but new in execution. The year is 2013, and this time Costner's [illegible] dry and water [illegible] goals for a [illegible] and inspiration to people who've lost everything following environmental disas[illegible].

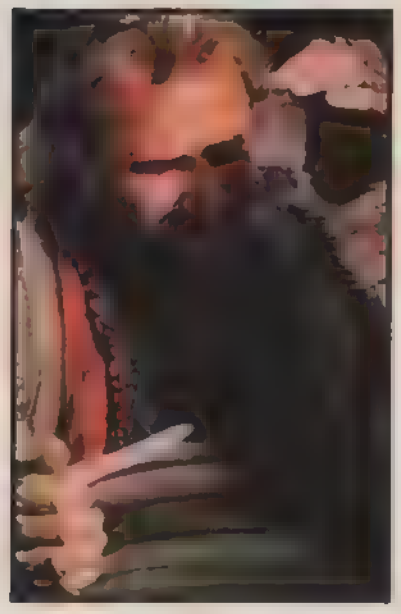
Isolated survivors, forced to live much like their ancestors of hundreds of years before, dream of making contact with fellow survivors in other struggling settlements, but the threat of an evil army headed by General Bethlehem (Will Patton) keeps them from venturing forth.

Then a wanderer comes upon the skeleton of a mail carrier, who fell before the conflict wiped out government, infrastructure and mass communication. The

wanderer dons the raggedy mail carrier's uniform and hefts the satchel full of undelivered letters beside the corpse. Armed with his new persona, the Postman Costner enters a small settlement and uses his cachet to scam a meal and a place to sleep. But the residents of the settlement, desperate to connect to times past, see the Postman as a symbol of hope and embrace him as a leader.

To Costner, who also directed and produced *The Postman*, the film is about humanity, not the destruction of it. "I think films have to have a heartbeat," he says. "If you're going to fight in a movie, you have to have something to fight for. If you're going to kill somebody, there has to be a reason why. If someone's going to die, it must hurt.

"And a lot of the characters in the film, as would be expected, do fight and get hurt. The Postman becomes a leader to a group of boys who are inspired to resist General Bethlehem and his army, the Holnists. A bloody conflict erupts, forcing the Postman to choose to abandon his new



identity or to fight on.

"I love the notion that this man lives a complete lie," Wilson says of the title character. "Here is a wandering vagabond who for need of shelter.... becomes 'the Postman' so he can go from town to town begging for food. And it snowballs into something that he can't possibly get out of. It's a great fairy tale in a way, set against the grandeur of the West."

It is a fairy tale of epic proportions—the go-cart movie not to recognize many of the players besides Costner. Featuring 57 speaking parts and shot over 140 days in Oregon, Arizona and Washington, Costner's $80 million-plus epic shares with his Academy award-winning *Dances With Wolves* a surprising

RUBBLE in the BRONX

It's a classic movie moment. A man falls to his knees and claws at wet sand, his well-oiled chest glistening in the sun, his dainty loincloth flapping in the breeze. "Damn you! Damn you all to hell," he screams, his jutting nutcracker jaw clinched so tight his huge, bonding white teeth threaten to crack at any moment. A reverse-angle shot reveals the cause of the man's breast beating hissy fit: the Statue of Liberty rises from the ocean at a cock-eyed angle, scorched and half melted.

New York's toast. Again.

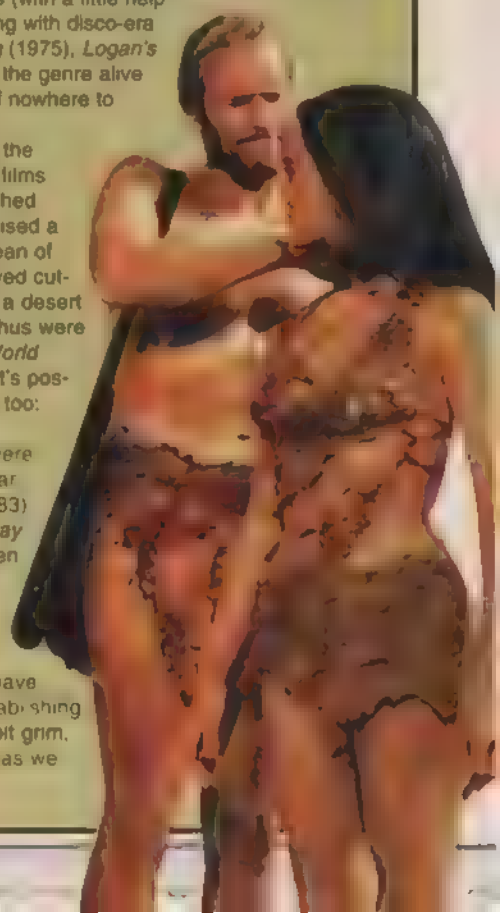
Of course, the movie was *Planet of the Apes*. And though no one can put the icing on the apocalyptic cake like Charlton Heston, it was far from the first or last time that Hollywood would try out a scorched-earth policy.

One of the earliest science-fiction epics—William Cameron Menzies' 1936 classic *Things to Come*—showed civilization torn asunder by a cataclysmic world war. In the post-Hiroshima age, cheesy drive-in flicks like *The Day the World Ended* (1956), *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959) and *The Last Woman on Earth* (1960) took up the civilization-destroying mantle. By the mid-'60s, the "A-bomb survivors battle for breeding rights with the last healthy woman" plotline was already a tired cliché.

Luckily for armageddon fans, Charlton Heston came along to breath new life into the genre with a triumvirate of world-ending epics: *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Omega Man* (1971) and *Soylent Green* (1973). Each put a new spin on mankind's demise—one by plague, one by famine, one by monkeys (with a little help from a nuclear holocaust). These movies—along with disco-era tales of the apocalypse like *A Boy and His Dog* (1975), *Logan's Run* (1976) and *Damnation Alley* (1977)—kept the genre alive until a small Australian picture could roar out of nowhere to completely revitalize it.

Mad Max (1979) introduced moviegoers to the burned-out wasteland era of end-of-the-world films. Instead of skulking around the rubble of scorched cities, the genre's tough-loner heroes now cruised a seemingly endless expanse of earth wiped clean of civilization. This desolate *mise en scene* allowed cut-rate filmmakers to simply film in the middle of a desert to establish a properly barbaric atmosphere; thus were born such knock-offs as *Warrior of the Lost World* (1984) and *Hell Comes to Frogtown* (1987). (It's possible to blow a lot of money on this approach, too: Just ask the producers of *Tank Girl*.)

Of course, more high-minded filmmakers were bound to come along to point out that a nuclear war might not be so much fun. *Testament* (1983), *Threads* (1984) and the relatively tame *The Day After* (1983) all sought to depress and enlighten more than amuse and entertain. Not surprisingly, such blatant bummer movies stopped appearing after the coming of *glasnost*. With the threat of actual annihilation diminished, entertaining movies like *The Postman* would have full ownership of the genre once again, re-establishing that the downfall of civilization might seem a bit grim, but Hollywood can make the end of the world as we know it feel just fine. —*Steve Hockensmith*



dearth of A-list stars

I don't feel the need to exclude well-known actors," Costner explains. "I just think what you're looking for is somebody who fits the part, and I'm not really afraid of people who don't have a resumé. I can look into their heart and into what they've done and try to decide if they're the right ones for it."

Costner's love interest in the film is played by Olivia Williams, a British-born television and stage actress who makes her feature-film debut as Abby.

"We kept looking for the right woman and we saw so many great ones," Costner recalls. "It got down to a couple actresses and you never know if you're right. But I wasn't wrong with Olivia."

In the end, the exhausting casting process for the part of the fair maiden Abby came down to a gut response to a snippet of audition tape.

"I wasn't particularly impressed with her video tape, and the cool thing was that she wasn't either," Costner recalls. "At the end of it, when they said cut and she looked at the camera, she just smiled this wonderful smile, as if to say, 'Man, I can do a lot better than this.' That smile was mesmerizing to me. I brought her all the way across the Atlantic Ocean just to see that smile in person."

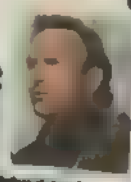
While Williams was a gamble for Costner, the director says he knew from the get-go who he wanted in the role of General Bethlehem. "I fixated on Will [Patton] as Bethlehem," says Costner, who worked with the veteran character actor on *No Way Out*. "Sometimes that can be bad and sometimes that can be very good. In this instance, it was very good."

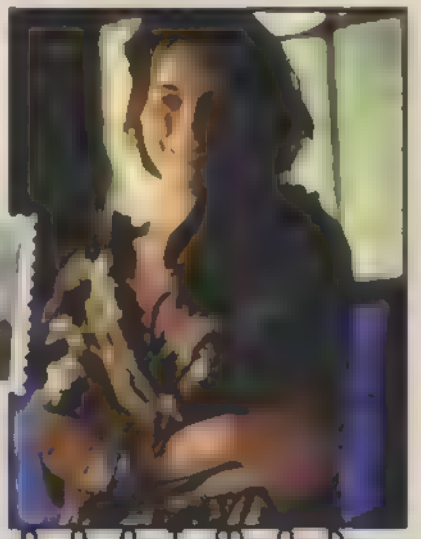
A truly surprising casting choice came in the role of the settlement's mayor.

"We were thinking of having a woman as mayor, but Kevin really wanted a musician for some reason," says Wilson. "We threw around a number of names and Tom Petty always came back. You know, it's a fresh face, yet someone you recognize from music videos."

The hard-rockin' Petty, a novice thespian, says he was as surprised as anyone when the call came in.

"I wouldn't have come after me for an acting gig," the veteran musician laughs. "But Kevin kind of had me in mind for the role, so I just show up and do what they tell me to do."





RETURN TO SENDER: Rising star Olivia Williams captivated her director with a smile.

The town Petty governs is called Bridge City, which was built vertically, about 400 feet high, against a privately operated, working dam in the small rural town of Metaline Falls, Washington, about a half mile from the Canadian border. Built over 12 weeks by a crew headed by production designer Ida Random, the set is one of the key settings in the film.

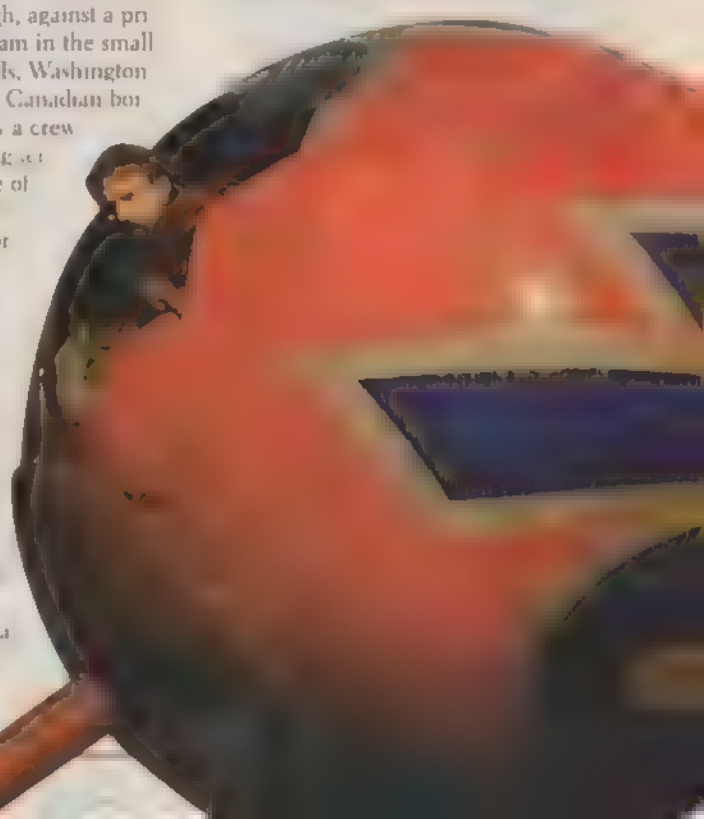
While *The Postman* is primarily set in the Pacific Northwest, bad weather forced the production to shift the start of principal photography to Tucson. Costner's golf comedy *Tin Cup* was shot a couple of years ago. "Thank God for Tucson," Costner told local reporters in early March when the film started shooting. About 75 technicians and 1,000 extras were hired to work on the film in Arizona, where filming commenced on

the mountains and at an open copper mining pit.

"This mine in Arizona seemed like it was at least eight miles deep," Patton recalls with a laugh. "It was the most amazing thing. Kevin said it was the biggest set he'd ever worked on."

In Washington, some of the filming was done at Rosario Beach in Deception Pass State Park, where a large statue was erected of a mail carrier on a running horse who is reaching down to accept a letter from a boy.

The production then moved to central Oregon's Three Lynx, Smith Rock and Newberry Crater areas, where 250 horses were rented and dyed black by their own

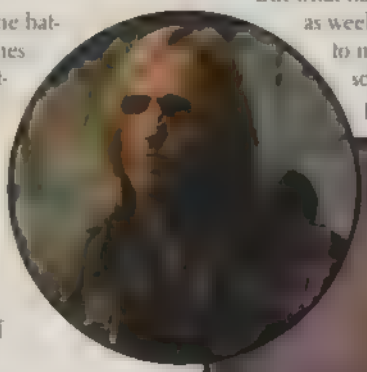


"The last thing I'd say is that *Postman* is a futuristic film. It's a post-apocalyptic film that is really retro-apocalyptic."

—producer Jim Wilson

ers for a gun battle of epic proportions. "It's very difficult to get 200 black horses," says costume designer John Bloomfield. "These guys were turning up and we persuaded them to dye all their horses." It reportedly took about 400 bottles of black hair dye to achieve the clear look of good versus evil.

To achieve the look of the battle scenes, there were at times three or four cameras shooting simultaneously. "We've got a lot of shots in the movie where there's a lot going on," Patton says. "I've never felt that kind of continuous movement with the camera. At first I was like 'Oh, man, this is impossible,' but I've kind of become addicted to it."



It was certainly an addiction to Costner, considering that the film took 12 years to get to the big screen. The project was originally in the hands of director Ron Howard, with Tom Hanks slotted as the Postman, and it has gone through various incarnations in scripts by Eric Roth (*Forrest Gump*) and then Brian Helgeland (*L.A. Confidential*) before Costner was finally able to roll cameras on it.

Costner was first introduced to *The Postman* project about 10 years ago, but his active involvement began in 1994 at Warner Bros., where he and Jim Wilson have a production deal. "[Producer] Steve Tisch and Warners brought it to us and said, 'Would you be interested?'" recalls Wilson.

"It all came slowly to me," Costner says of his involvement in the project. "I guess it worked its way to me. I don't know how that happens, or why, but it does."

"I think [Costner] came to this as an actor first," Wilson says. "It's a beautifully crafted character, one that he felt comfortable in, one that would challenge him in many ways. And then I think he saw all the potential in [the whole film]."

Then discussions turned to directors. "He didn't leap [up] and say, 'I have to direct this movie,'" Wilson recalls. "He didn't do that on *Dances with Wolves*, either. But what happened is, as time went by, as weeks went by, and we started to involve ourselves with the screenplay and the whole process, it then became a part of [him] and he wanted to direct."

To make the film, Costner and Wilson brought together many of the same people with whom they had previously worked, including director of photography Stephen Windon and editor Peter Boyle. Even though Costner and his producing partner have *Dances with Wolves* and *Waterworld* on their resumés, *Postman* is the biggest production they've tackled—and both men know there's a lot riding on it.

"I don't think the post-apocalyptic future works [anymore]," says one influential doubter, Jorge Saralegui, who is the executive vice president of development and production at Twentieth Century Fox. "What happened with movies set in a post-apocalyptic future, like *Mad Max*, is not unlike what happened with *Halloween*," he says. "After the success of *Halloween*, there were schlocky ripoffs for years, like *Tank Girl*."

Costner and Wilson, however, want to retrieve the subgenre from those ripoff artists and even make it fashionable again. Still, they seem to carry the burden of maintaining the end of civilization with surprising ease. Wilson believes that even with the Cold War slipping into the past, Hollywood will continue on with apocalyptic stories regardless of *The Postman*'s final box-office tally. What he and Costner are most concerned about, he says, isn't the subgenre's health or even the epic sweep of a project that requires as many as 1,400 people working on a single day, but the intimacy of the human story. "We would simply look at the script every day when we'd start and we would say, 'What is the kernel [of the story] here?' And that would do it." ◆

masters of the digital domain

BY MARC CAMRON

Will DVD send videocassettes to the ashheap of history?

Hurry, hurry, hurry!

Step right up and see the latest marvel of the modern world. Right here in your entertainment center is a motion picture on one side of a teeny, tiny, seven-inch platter, the image crackling and shimmering with a quality never before achieved in your own living room.

Zounds! Zoetrope! Classic movies, new releases, Bruce Willis's deadpan scowl, Jackie Chan's gravity-defying stunts, those fetching Victoria's Secret models, everything you could ever want in a personal movie experience, all in one neat package. Really! Instead of wait-and-wonder videocassettes, with their fuzzy images and muddy sound, DVD delivers movies in digital perfection, the way they were made to be seen. Always. Ready to do your bidding, at the push of a button. Available at the leading video warehouse. Don't miss out.

The New Thing

That's right. If you listen to all the hype you'd think the day of the VHS tape had passed. Yes, it's true that DVD offers unparalleled performance. It even outshines laser discs in certain ways, offering the clearest picture and truest sound available in any current home-theater format. It is also true that while support for DVD was spotty at the early stages, more and more of the big Hollywood studios have now agreed to support the format.

But hold on. Before you run out and purchase a DVD player, there are a few things you should know. Technology is changing rapidly, and what seems like a sure thing one day—remember how Direct TV was going to wipe out the video market?—may prove a passing fad the next. The intent of this article is to strip away the myths about DVD and present the facts and analysis you need to intelligently evaluate the present and near future of this new technology.

A Look Back

Optical technology (a laser that reads information on a disc) is not a new threat to the video industry. As a matter of fact, laserdiscs have been around almost as long as mass-market videocassette tapes.

Laserdiscs were introduced in 1980 and have had a small but fiercely loyal, following for years. Laserdiscs offer better quality than VHS videocassettes. Still, there were certain sacrifices the laserdisc connoisseur had to make.

The information stored on laserdiscs takes up a great amount of space. Because of that, the discs are large (12 inches compared to 5 inches for compact discs) and most movies require at least two sides to hold all of the information.

Laserdiscs have also been widely regarded as an elitist format, appealing mainly to movie junkies and other hardcore enthusiasts. This belief is a hold-over from the early days of the format when laserdiscs were hard to come by, videotapes were sold almost exclusively for the rental market and personal video collections were for the rich and eccentric.

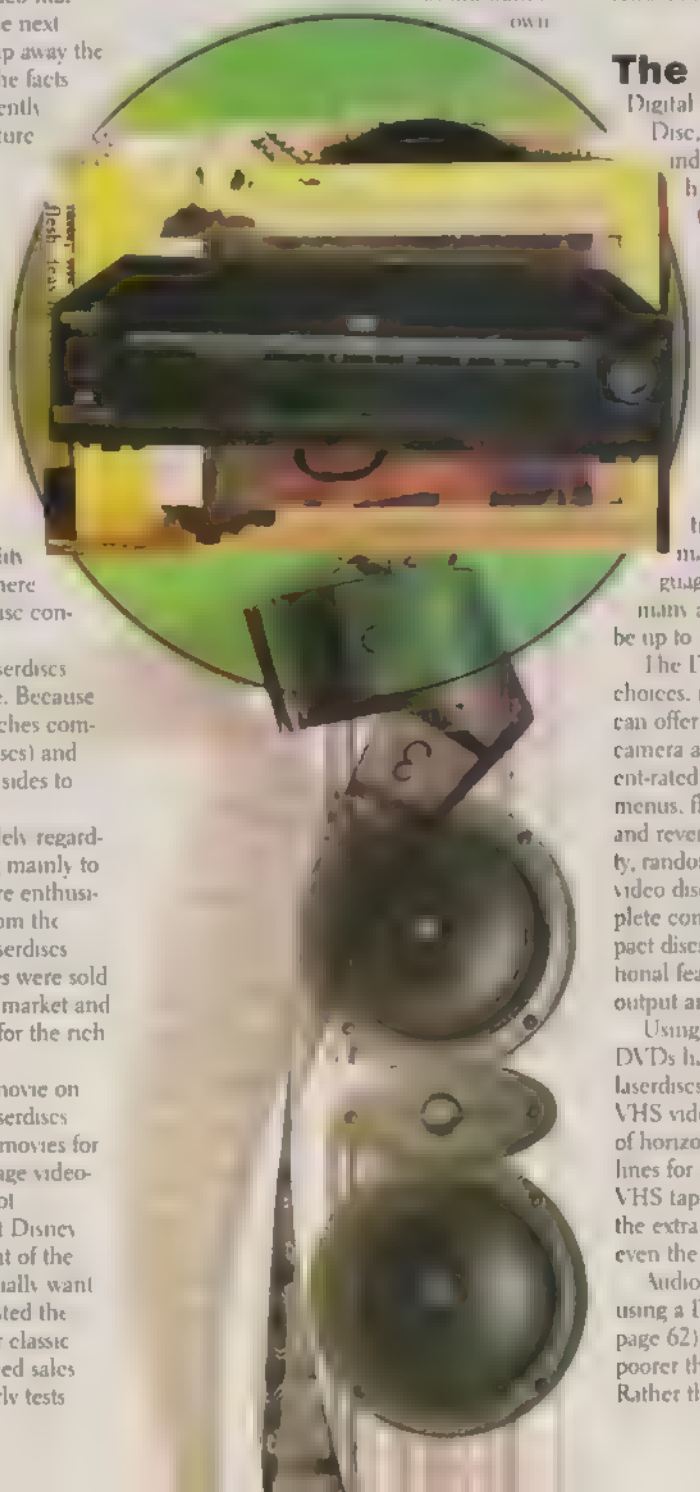
In the early 1980s, a typical movie on videotape cost close to $100. Laserdiscs allowed enthusiasts to purchase movies for roughly half the cost of the average videotape and get better quality to boot.

Then, in the mid 1980s, Walt Disney Co. wagered that a large segment of the rental consumer base might actually want to *buy* movies too. So Disney tested the waters by releasing some of their classic films on videocassette at a reduced sales price—typically $29.95. The early tests were quite successful and Disney stepped up its efforts, releasing more and more titles and bringing the price down even further.

Other studios, upon seeing Disney's success, started dabbling in "consumer priced" videos as well. Soon, a two-tiered system developed. The top brand movies were released at "popular prices" ranging from $14.99 to $24.99. All others—those that would likely only appeal as a purchase to cult fans—were released with "rental prices, from $74.99 to $99.99. Once the rental market on titles had run its course, most of these titles would be re-released for sale at the "popular" price. Only a few years after Hollywood had reached the conclusion that no one—or at least very few people—would want to own their own movie collection, retail chains like Suncoast Video were reaping big profits by offering nothing but movies for sale.

As technology developed, laserdiscs did gain in popularity. Bigger and better TVs and home sound systems led to increased interest and sales. Laserdiscs met the demands of high-tech consumers seeking the "real" movie experience in their homes by offering digital sound and high-resolution video. Laserdisc makers also introduced "widescreen" or "letterboxed" movies, offering the original theatrical picture rather than the chopped and cropped picture made to fit TV sets.

Now, as the demand for the high-quality home-theater experience has reached a crescendo, the DVD has been rolled out.



The Basics

Digital Video Disc (or Digital Versatile Disc, if you ask those in the computer industry) is a new format that places highly compressed digital information onto a disc that resembles a standard 5-inch CD.

DVD movies offer just over two hours of high-resolution digital video per disc side. In addition, each side is capable of holding two layers of information, bringing the grand total to just over eight hours of information on a single disc. Along with video, the discs can hold information such as digital audio (used mainly for incorporating multiple languages on a single disc) each with as many as eight channels. There can also be up to 32 subtitle tracks.

The DVD system offers the viewer choices, many of which no other system can offer. Among the options: multiple camera angles, selected editing for different-rated versions of a film, interactive menus, flawless freeze frame, fast forward and reverse, parental lock, programmability, random play (used mainly for music-video discs), digital audio output and complete compatibility with current audio compact discs. Some DVD players offer additional features such as component video output and laserdisc compatibility.

Using MPEG2 video compression, DVDs have better video resolution than laserdiscs and considerably better than VHS videotapes. DVDs support 500 lines of horizontal resolution compared to 425 lines for laserdisc and a paltry 240 lines for VHS tape. These are not subtle differences; the extra lines of resolution are apparent to even the most nondiscriminating eye.

Audio is another matter. For those not using a Dolby Digital decoder (see sidebar, page 62), sound from the DVD will be poorer than that of a laserdisc player. Rather than having separate tracks for

Dolby Surround and Dolby Digital, the DVD converts the higher quality Dolby Digital track down to standard Dolby Surround Sound track. Between the "downmix" and the necessary compression, consumers really lose out by not having a Dolby Digital decoder.

Promises, Promises

Critics are quick to point out that many of the features touted by DVD manufacturers simply are not available on the first generation systems—and may never be.

Promise: Multiple (viewer selectable) aspect ratios.

Reality: Many of the discs do have both widescreen and pan and scan versions, but they are not selectable at the touch of a button. Instead, they are on opposite sides of the disc and the viewer must choose before watching the film.

Promise: Multiple camera angles.

Reality: Camera angles must be programmed into the disc by the manufacturer. At present, few movies support the multiple camera angles function, and almost all that do are X-rated fare rather than commercial Hollywood releases.

Promise: Multiple versions/parental lock-out.

Reality: Again, this is something that must be programmed on the disc. At this time, there are no movies that support multiple versions.

Promise: Zooming.

Reality: The latest players to hit the market do support zooming.

Promise: Multiple-language versions.

Reality: Yes! Most discs support several languages. Most popular are Spanish and French.

Promise: No more flipping discs. All movies on one disc side.

Reality: No. Many movies do fit on one side, but just as many—including major releases like *Goodfellas*, *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers*, *The Piano*, *Brief Encounter*, *The Right Stuff*, *Seven*, *Sleepers*, *Stargate* and *A Time to Kill*—still require the viewer to flip the disc. Dual-layer technology exists to make it possible for all movies to be on one side, but with four hours of video on both sides, it's not. However, most studios do not support this feature yet. And at this time, no DVD players on the market change sides as LaserDisc and disc players do.

Why Not DVD?

So you've looked at the DVD format and what's currently available, and you're thinking to yourself, "Hey, it looks pretty good. Why should I not buy it?" Well maybe you should. But maybe not—at least not yet. Here are some reasons you might want to hold off.

Software. It will take several years for

pay and play

DIVX (previously known as Zoom TV)

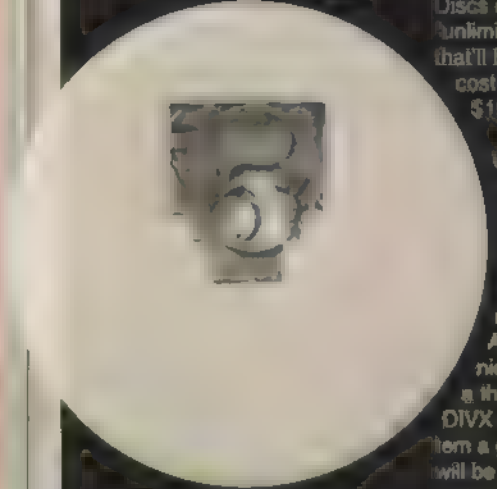
is about to become a reality—and not everyone is pleased about that. Warner Home Video president Warren Lieberfarb, voicing the concerns of many in the industry, has said the "potential for consumer confusion is quite serious" and that there will be a "backlash from the video rental stores." The President of the Video Software Dealers Association has said DIVX would likely have "a negative impact on the home-video industry by confusing consumers and igniting a new format war just when DVD appears to be enjoying a successful launch."

So what's all the brouhaha about? DIVX, a modified version of DVD technology, uses a play-

watched at any time, either right away or weeks later. There is a catch, though: once viewed, the disc remains "active" for only two days. After the initial viewing period, you will have to pay for the privilege of viewing it again.

The way this happens is Orwellian to critics, liberating to proponents. The brain of the DIVX machine stores a number gleaned from the disc, and at a predetermined time (most likely in the middle of the night when the company figures no one will be on the phone) the machine automatically dials a toll-free number and informs the main DIVX computer that you have watched the disc. If you watch the film again (after your initial two-day period), the machine will make note of that and charge your DIVX account. Discs can be converted to "unlimited viewing," an option that'll be about the same in cost as a new DVD, from $19.95 to $29.95.

Disney, Paramount, Universal and DreamWorks SKG have signed agreements to release all of their titles on DIVX at the same time as their VHS release dates. Additionally, these companies will also supply almost a thousand catalog titles for DIVX release to give the system a good push. DIVX players will be available starting in the spring of next year from RCA, Proscan and Panasonic. —M.C.



that's similar to current DVD players—with one major difference. There's a modem in the back.

Simply put, DIVX, which is majority-owned by retail giant Circuit City, is a pay-per-view system of renting and owning DVDs that requires establishing a charge account via modem. The DIVX discs, which look exactly like a standard DVD, will be available for about $5. They can be

inhome theater

So, you've decided to buy a DVD player and you're wondering what else you're going to need for that realistic theater experience in your own home. Here's a quick check list:

Big TV. That's right. No more 13-inch set balanced on your stomach for watching football games and David Letterman. If you're going to have a real home theater, you will need *at least* a 27-inch television set. Don't scrimp here—it would be pointless to get the DVD system without a big ol' set to hook it up to. If you can afford it, go up to a 32-, 35- or even a 45-inch rear-projection model. Mitsubishi, Sony and Proscan offer the best tube and projection sets available.

Surround Sound Receiver. A large part of the home-theater experience is the sound. To achieve top-quality decibels, it's necessary to have a receiver or amplifier and pre-amp/processor that supports surround sound. The bare minimum is a receiver supporting Dolby Surround Sound. This will yield acceptable sound by almost all standards. If you are purchasing a new receiver, seriously consider one that has a Dolby Digital processor. Dolby Digital is the standard for sound on DVD and will be the standard for the upcoming HDTV. Even laserdiscs and DVHS are quickly adopting the Dolby Digital as their norm. Yamaha, Sony and Denon all make first-rate receivers with Dolby Digital built in.

Speakers. That's plural—you need more than one. For either Dolby Surround or Dolby Digital, you need at least five speakers to take advantage of the surround sound technology. With Dolby Digital it's smart to have a good sub-woofer as well. Make sure that you match your speakers with one another. A set of mis-matched speakers can produce some really ugly noise. After your TV set, a good set of speakers is the most important element to a good home theater. For great speakers at a reasonable price, check out the Altec Lansing 250 I Surround Sound set.

Wire. Finally, don't forget that the wires you use to hook everything together will have a huge impact on your system. Both speaker wire and component interconnects range from cheap and crudd to really expensive and beautiful. At least go with some mid-quality wire to keep unwanted outside noise away from your system. For those really looking to do it right, check out the full line of wiring offered by Monster Cable. *M C*

there to be a film library as large as the one available for laserdiscs, and even longer before it can rival VHS. Remember, there are millions of VCRs in the world, and that leaves a huge potential market for those releasing videotapes. DVDs are less than a year old—it will take time to catch up.

Quality. The quality and variety of features of DVD players are top of the line, but that's not all there is to it. It is still up to the programmers to supply movies that have been properly programmed to take advantage of the picture and sound quality as well as all the special features. Remember that it takes some pretty new compression technology to fit a film onto a little disc. If the information has been poorly compressed, the result can be terrible.

First-Generation Technology. As already mentioned, DVD is still a young technology. The second-generation machines are just now being manufactured, and it's the first-generation machines that are on most retail shelves. Aside from the expense that comes with a new technology (expect to pay anywhere from $500 to $1,200 for a first-generation machine) there is also the inevitable leap in technology that will leave these machines looking like antiques in just a couple of years. (Remember that snazzy Mac SE you used to have?) Future machines will have more features, better overall quality and, most importantly, they will have all of the bugs worked out.

Studio Support. Most of the studios are now on board, but there are a couple of notable exceptions. Paramount has only agreed to support the DIVX system at this time (see sidebar on previous page) and Twentieth Century Fox has still not announced any support at all. The latest studio to jump on the bandwagon is Disney but it has not announced the release of any of its animated classics yet. Industry expectations are that by next year, all studios will be supporting the DVD format.

Recordability. To put it plainly, there is none—at least not yet. Most of the major Hollywood studios are worried about a recordable DVD format. They fear what could happen to their bottom lines should video pirates be able to make perfect copies of movies. While this is certainly understandable, it remains to be seen how the average Joe and Jane Consumers will react to a format that does not allow them to record their favorite soap opera as well as watch the latest Hollywood blockbusters. A recordable format should emerge in the future (the studios had the same fears about videotapes 20 years ago), but don't expect to see it before the turn of the century.

Cautious Approach

Is DVD the only answer if you want to be part of the home-theater future? Not necessarily. Here are some other options:

VHS. That's right, good old videotape. There are tens of thousands of movies of every sort available on VHS and more being released every day. It is the standard and it will take quite a few years for that to change. VHS tapes still offer one thing that no other format does—recordability. Until you can record *ER* on a DVD, don't expect VHS to go away.

DVHS. Digital VHS is a reality. JVC is starting to push this new format along with their Digital Satellite System to make for one incredible home-theater experience. Now it is possible to make a high-resolution recording in your home, about equal in quality to laserdisc resolutions. Best of all, the DVHS system is downward compatible with all standard VHS tapes, saving your current collection.

DSS. Digital satellite systems are a great alternative for those who are more interested in renting the latest films than purchasing them and don't want to jump in the car and drive to Blockbuster every time the movie-watching bug strikes. Many DSS systems offer as many as 100 channels of pay-per-view movies along with all currently available premium channels and standard cable channels. Plus, if you are a big time sports fan, there are many sports packages you can purchase. All in all, DSS is one of the best choices for home entertainment.

Laserdiscs. Still the format of choice for most hardcore home-theater junkies for one obvious reason: there are almost 10,000 laserdiscs currently available in the United States, with many more on the way. The quality is excellent and most movies are currently being released in their original widescreen format with digital sound where applicable and sometimes even cool extras not available on either VHS or DVD.

Ready to Buy

Okay, you've weighed all the pros and cons and are going to take the plunge into DVD-land. Here's what should you do now.

The first step is to pick a player. Obviously, it is important to choose a player that supports features that interest you and *only* those features. For example, don't pay extra for a player that offers component video-out unless you own or plan to purchase a TV that supports component video in. It is possible to spend a ton of money on features you just aren't going to use, so take a little time, research the various players and, hey, search your soul. Do you really need all the bells and whistles?

Also, make sure that you have all of the other equipment necessary to make the most of your DVD player. You could have the best DVD player in the world, but if you are connecting it to the RF antenna connection of a 12-inch black-and-white TV, you aren't going to be happy.

Most of all, make sure that you are going to use your new DVD player. There are only a handful of movies available right now, and whether you are going to buy or rent, that still translates into a limited selection. Make sure that you are as aware as possible about present limitations. Be happy with your choice to delve into the future and be aware that like all new technology, there is a chance that you will be part of a small group, at least for a while. ◆

The Name Game

The next Star Wars' characters are right on the (trade) mark

by steve harris

When a clutch of online fan sites listed the alleged names of characters in the forthcoming *Star Wars* prequels the appellations evoked as many snickers as surprises. After all the names, ranging from Sio Bibble to Naboo, often sounded more like a toddler's first words than intergalactic monikers.

Which isn't to say the list was just fan fantasies at play. In fact many of the names that fans have spread across the Internet have indeed been secured by director George Lucas' Lucasfilm Ltd. A review of the company's trademark-ownership records revealed hundreds of possible names of key characters, as well as long-time favorites such as Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. Among the discoveries:

Queen Padme Naberrie Amidàla (Natalie Portman). The "young queen" Lucas has referred to as "a pivotal character" in the new films.

Jar Jar Binks (Ahmed Best): One of the film's primary characters, who may be "enhanced" with computer effects.

Senator Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid, unconfirmed): The future emperor.

Shmi Skywalker (Pernilla August): Mother to the future Darth Vader.

Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson, unconfirmed): The "venerable" Jedi Knight who plays a pivotal role in the life of young Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd).

Other uniquely named characters that may appear in the next film include Sebulba, Watto, Mace Windu (a name revealed from Lucas' original *Star Wars* treatment) and Gungan. Additionally, trademarks for two new characters have a familiar ring: Darth Sidious and Darth Maul.

Some of the more intriguing trademarks that turned up were "OB 1 Bumpy" and "OB 1 Street." For years, fans have speculated that Obi-Wan is a phonetic spelling of a clone designation but speculation still reigns. Bumpy and Street could be related to Obi-Wan Kenobi, or OB1 could be a clone designation or simply a title.

The Lucasfilm trademark records reveal not only the future of the Force but also the abundance of *incorrect* information on the Web. Many names circulated by fans, such as Sio Bibble, are not Lucasfilm trademarks and are thus unlikely to find their way into the prequels.

The only thing we know for sure is that Lucas isn't talking. According to sources familiar with the production, Lucas is prepared to change significant portions of the first film to ensure that fans are surprised when Episode One finally premieres 18 months from now. ◆

WARS STARS: (Clockwise from top left) Lloyd, Portman, McGregor and Neeson

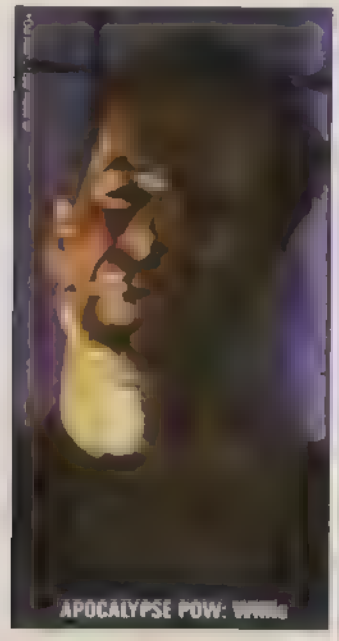
That's A Wrap!

The next *Star Wars* film (Episode One) completed principal photography September 26, 1997 just over 21 years after George Lucas wrapped the original film. Here's how production of the new instalment stacks up to the first:

Total Days Of Filming
Star Wars: 82
Episode One: 94

Days Of Post-Production
Star Wars: About 240
Episode One: 606

Production Budget
Star Wars: $11 Million
Episode One: $60 Million
(Lucasfilm estimate)



A.I.

Plot: Details are scarce, but rumors suggest that the film will follow one special boy's development in a future society dependent on computers
Players: TBD
Director: Stanley Kubrick
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: TBD
Latest Rumors: As post-production progresses on Kubrick's torrid sex drama *Eyes Wide Shut*, the reclusive director is prepping *A.I.* which would be his first SF pic since *A Clockwork Orange*
Inside Buzz: Could be a great movie if EWS ever wraps

I Am Legend

Plot: Based on a novel by Richard Matheson, this remake of the 1971 Charlton Heston film *The Omega Man* casts Schwarzenegger as the last man on Earth to avoid a killer plague. Action erupts when the sun goes down and clans of zombie vampires go on the rampage through the streets of San Francisco
Players: Arnold Schwarzenegger
Director: Ridley Scott
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: Summer 1998
Latest Rumors: The film will be much more action-oriented than its predecessor. Shooting is scheduled to begin by year-end in L.A.
Inside Buzz: *The Omega Man* had a creepy combination of action and scares but never boasted the kind of firepower that Arnold will be toting. The big-time action in the movie's third act is expected to take the place of the heavy-handed political message of the original

Area 51

Plot: Based on the popular video game that placed players inside an ultra-secret government compound taken over by deadly, shape-shifting aliens
Players: TBD
Director: TBD
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: TBD
Latest Rumors: Script-writing duo Brannon Braga and Ronald Moore, best known for *Star Trek Generations*, have reportedly delivered a final shooting script to New Line
Inside Buzz: We've seen aliens invade, contact us and go undercover, so why not aliens taking over federal property and assuming the identities of human beings? Seems to happen after every election

Armageddon

Plot: Jerry Bruckheimer introduces a rock of a different kind in his latest summer action movie. After an asteroid is spotted hurtling toward Earth and scientists determine that it won't be yielding the right of way, the human race turns to a crack team of experts that must jump on a spacecraft and mount nukes on the rock before it wipes us out. Smaller meteors provide some city-vaporizing effects prior to the big finale
Players: Bruce Willis, Billy Bob Thornton, Steve Buscemi
Director: Michael Bay
Status: Now filming
Release Date: Summer 1998
Latest Rumors: The big-budget film is supposed to feature major action set pieces in space shuttles on asteroid rovers and possibly on the Mir space station
Inside Buzz: With *Armageddon* going head-to-head with *Deep Impact* next summer, moviegoers may end up hating falling rocks as much as they hate volcanos now

The Avengers

Plot: Jerry Weintraub visits the action genre once again with this remake of the '60s TV show. Appropriately, the setup is very Bondian. Secret agents must stop a sinister scientist, who plans world domination through control of the Earth's weather patterns
Players: Sean Connery, Ralph Fiennes, Uma Thurman
Director: Jeremiah Chechik
Status: Post-production
Release Date: [illegible]
Latest Rumors: Despite a studio fire in June that destroyed some of the *Avengers* sets, filming recently wrapped in England
Inside Buzz: If Uma and Ralph can generate some chemistry, this big-budget film may give the *X Files* feature some stiff competition next summer

Batman: Dark Knight

Plot: After *Batman and Robin* which was critically drubbed and underperformed at the box office, Warner Bros. hopes to return the Batman franchise to its roots with a darker tone, fewer gadgets and two new villains, Harley Quinn and Scarecrow
Players: George Clooney, Chris O'Donnel.
Director: Joel Schumacher
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: Summer 1999
Latest Rumors: It has been reported that Clooney will not suit up for Batman again. John Travolta, Kevin Spacey and Jeff Goldblum are all being touted as the Scarecrow. Schumacher and O'Donnell are also rumored to be on their way out of the franchise
Inside Buzz: Will Clooney don the cape once again? Will Schumacher get the Bat-boot? Stay tuned to this Bat-channel

The Bionic Man

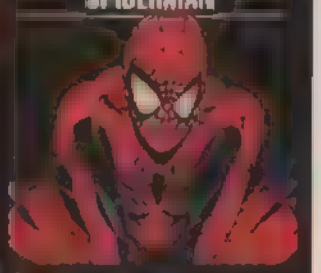
Plot: Astronaut Steve Austin, a man barely alive after a spacecraft accident, is rebuilt into a half man/half-machine cyborg whose bionic abilities allow him to assist the government in various covert activities
Players: TBD
Director: TBD
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: 1999
Latest Rumors: It has been reported that *Alien Resurrection* scripter Joss Whedon will be penning the Six *Million Dollar Man* movie – and that, praise the gods, Lee Majors won't make a cameo
Inside Buzz: Studio thinking is straightforward. If *The Brady Bunch* can be made into a feature film success story, why not the *Six Million Dollar Man*?

Crush Depth

Plot: A scientific team at the polar icecaps encounters difficulties as their submarine becomes trapped and its occupants fight against the elements to survive
Players: Stephen Baldwin, Gabrielle Anwar, Tom Conti
Director: Gregg Champion
Status: Post-production
Release Date: TBD
Latest Rumors: Director Gregg Champion has removed himself

LOST and FOUND

JAMES CAMERON'S SPIDERMAN



Lost: After James Cameron won commercial success and Hollywood power with a clutch of hit movies in the '80s—*Terminator*, *Aliens* and *Terminator 2*—he turned his attention to bringing one of Marvel Comics' most famous superheroes to the screen. But in spite of Cameron's clout, a finished screenplay approved by Spider-Man creator Stan Lee and a variety of promotional trinkets heralding a summer 1993 release, the collapse of Carolco Pictures left the rights to Cameron's next sure-thing hit in legal limbo.
Found: The thoughtless largesse of Carolco in its heyday resulted in an expansive array of obligations to a variety of creditors—chief among them MGM, which had bankrolled the ministudio's last attempt to stay afloat, the disastrous pirate adventure *Cutthroat Island*. MGM's claim against Carolco was settled earlier this year for option rights to several properties and the direct transfer of the Spider-Man film rights.

The upshot for Spidey fans: A film version of the comic is back on a major studio's production slate. Whether or not James Cameron will figure into the mix, however, remains unclear. The director has a multi-picture pact with MGM rival Twentieth Century Fox, but sources close to Cameron insist the filmmaker remains interested in the project.

TITANIC DIFFERENCES

What happens as epic costs billions of dollars. And as James Cameron's power has increased in Hollywood, so have his budgets. A comparison of the film-director's most recent epic with his breakthrough film tells the story.

	Terminator	Titanic
Studio	Pacific Western	Twentieth Century Fox
Budget	$6.4 million	$200 million (est.)
Domestic Box Office	$36.9 million	[illegible]
Sequel Box Office	$204.8 million	Fat chance
Running Time	1 hour, 48 minutes	3 hours, 14 minutes
Cost Per Minute	$59,200	$1,030,930
Special FX Budget	$1 million	$75 million (est.)
Special FX By	Stan Winston	Digital Domain
Number of Scenes Featuring Water	[illegible]	400 (est.)
Bill Paxton	Plays a skinhead punk searching for his clothes	Plays an explorer searching for a sunken liner
Leanette Goldstein	The foster mother in sequel who is killed by T-1000	The mother in third-class who is killed by R.O.S.
Percentage of Final Take Cameron Gets	3%	6%

from the project [illegible] change its name to *Sub Down* or *Dark Waters*.

Inside Buzz: *Apollo 13* under the Arctic ice caps. Hollywood, we have a problem.

DEEP IMPACT

Plot: DreamWorks' [illegible] budget summer event film chronicles the efforts of a group of people to stop a rapidly approaching comet.

Players: Téa Leoni, Robert Duvall, Morgan Freeman, Mary McCormack, Elijah Wood, Vanessa Redgrave.

Director: Mimi Leder.

Status: Now filming.

Release Date: Summer 1998.

Latest Rumors: A tragedy of [illegible] is expected to occur at the Mall in Washington D.C. The movie promises to live up to its title with two separate impact sequences.

Inside Buzz: The biggest setback for this "disaster" film will be the release date of *Armageddon* from Touchstone. The early word is that this film will make Téa Leoni a household name.

ENDER'S GAME

Plot: Adapted from the award winning novel by Orson Scott Card that follows a young boy trained as a military prospect for an invasion by alien "buggers."

Players: TBD.

Director: TBD.

Status: In development.

Release Date: TBD.

Latest Rumors: Author Card has supposedly told various sources that he has received [illegible] Pictures. [illegible] Ender's Game [illegible] Looney Tunes' Daffy Duck is a 12-year-old.

Inside Buzz: Soldiers preparing to repulse an invasion of bugs? After *Starship Troopers*, will moviegoers be looking for a second helping of buggers?

FAHRENHEIT 451

Plot: The fireman of the future is charged with extinguishing the free thought and creativity found in books until one of the burners begins [illegible] the government's motives.

Players: TBD.

Director: Mel Gibson.

Status: Pre-production.

Release Date: TBD.

Latest Rumors: Sean Connery and Mel Gibson may star in the [illegible]

Inside Buzz: [illegible]

FIRESTORM

Plot: [illegible]

Players: Howie Long, [illegible]

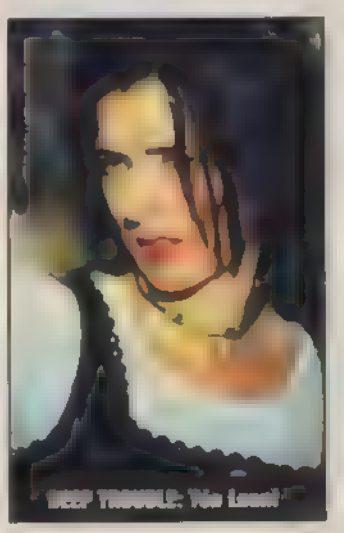
Director: [illegible]

Status: Post-production.

Release Date: Spring 1998.

Latest Rumors: The movie may involve the kidnapping of a U.S. senator and could air on the Fox Network instead of being released to theaters.

Inside Buzz: *Con Air* meets *Backdraft*. Can't Scott Glenn save himself out of the [illegible]



FORBIDDEN PLANET

Plot: A group of explorers [illegible] a planet in the far reaches of space.

Players: TBD.

Director: TBD.

Status: Pre-production.

Release Date: TBD.

Latest Rumors: Harlan Ellison [illegible] are remaking the original film and not creating a sequel.

Inside Buzz: Classic sci-fi that could use a facelift. As long as it doesn't turn into a blast-a-thon it could be a winner.

GODZILLA

Plot: The [illegible] way across the [illegible]

Players: [illegible] scientists, the military [illegible] pursuit. Look for the [illegible]

LEAPIN' LIZARDS: Broderick

pay a visit to the Big Apple and set up a nest of hundreds of Babyzilla in Madison Square Garden

Players: Matthew Broderick, Jean Reno, Maria Pitillo, Harry Shearer

Director: Roland Emmerich

Status: Now filming

Release Date: May 20, 1998

Latest Rumors: Godzilla may possess the ability to cloak like a chameleon. The big-G might also walk upright but sprint on all fours like a reptile.

Inside Buzz: Storyline appears pretty two-dimensional, sharing the ethnic diversity of Emmerich's *ID4* good for foreign returns. Effects will be boffo, however, and early release date should insure more big returns for Tri-Star.

HIGHLANDER 4

Plot: The immortals are appearing once again for another decapitating good time. Specific storylines have yet to be divulged, but continuation of the Highlander mythos should provide most of the action and dramatic backdrop.

Players: Adrian Paul

Director: TBD

Status: In development

Release Date: TBD

Latest Rumors: According to published reports, Adrian Paul will star in the fourth *Highlander* film regardless of whether or not series stalwart Christopher Lambert makes a return engagement to the Clan MacLeod.

Inside Buzz: The original remains a fine piece of fantasy film making, and the TV series continues to pull strong ratings. Now it

[illegible] *Highlander 2* [illegible]

INDEPENDENCE DAY 2

Plot: Presently unknown, but likely to involve the elimination of remaining alien forces on Earth, the development of new alien tech [illegible] for warfare and a breakdown of the planet's world-wide [illegible] alien ships approach.

Players: TBD

Director: [illegible]

Status: Unknown

Release Date: Not before 2000.

Latest Rumors: [illegible] *ID4* ever has been making the rounds, but don't believe it. Studio officials plan to build a novelization series with the franchise and have been planning a sequel since *ID4* opening weekend.

Inside Buzz: With a virtually guaranteed $80 million opening, Emmerich and Devlin can write their own [illegible] when will they have time in their [illegible]

INDIANA JONES 4

Plot: The next [illegible] Indiana Jones saga will have Indy travelling the world in search of a mysterious artifact [illegible], your guess is as good as ours.

Players: Harrison Ford

Director: Steven Spielberg

Status: In development

Release Date: [illegible]

Latest Rumors: Karen Allen, John Rhys-Davies and Sean Connery will return, and Kevin Costner or Tom Selleck may play [illegible]. The storyline reportedly involves Area 51 and alien [illegible] government type.

Inside Buzz: Another sure-thing sequel that will get made if Ford, Spielberg and a good script all converge. All the parties say they want to do it, but at this pace Ford will be playing Grandpa Jones.

LETHAL WEAPON 4

Plot: [illegible] stories will [illegible] work for the cop and his over-the-hill partner.

Players: Mel Gibson, Danny Glover, Joe Pesci (unconfirmed), Chris Rock

Director: Richard Donner

Status: Pre-production

Release Date: [illegible]

Latest Rumors: [illegible] recently announced that all of the [illegible]

Lethal Weapon 3 would likely return for the next sequel.

Inside Buzz: Rock will join the cast as a computer or technical expert. While Gibson and Glover have shown little interest in reprising their roles as Riggs and Murtaugh, a rumored [illegible] paydays for Gibson may have changed his mind. But has their act [illegible]

LOST IN SPACE

Plot: The space family Robinson is picked to travel to another star system and establish a warp portal that will allow for quick colonization. Evil Dr. Smith stows away [illegible] hop and causes it to be flung across the galaxy. Lost in space.

Players: William Hurt, Mimi Rogers, Gary Oldman, Matt LeBlanc

Director: Stephen Hopkins

Status: Post-production

Release Date: Summer 1998

Latest Rumors: The movie may involve time travel on an alien world. Oldman's Dr. Smith will be a straight villain, like the original [illegible]. The film will use extensive CGI. A new robot has been designed [illegible] the Robinson family.

Inside Buzz: Reaction to the first trailer has been positive, with early effects work drawing strong interest.

BATMAN

Plot: [illegible] when a regular loser [illegible] that the world [illegible]

Players: [illegible]

Director: [illegible]

Status: [illegible]

Release Date: [illegible]

Latest Rumors: Both Keanu Reeves and Val Kilmer are supposedly attached to the project.

Inside Buzz: May draw additional interest in the wake of films like *The Game* that throw unwitting people into incredible situations.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

Plot: Remake of the classic 1949 film tale of a beautiful woman and her oversized pet ape, who is kidnapped from the wild and put on display in America.

Players: Bill Paxton, Charlize [illegible]

HORSE PLAY: Harrison Ford

Director: Ron Underwood
Status: In production
Release Date: Summer 1998
Latest Rumors: Rick Baker is providing the designs for Joe, who will be CGI. Filming may take place at Mann's Chinese Theater with Ray Harryhausen in a cameo
Inside Buzz: Between this, *Planet of the Apes* and a possible *King Kong* remake, Hollywood appears to be taking monkey business to new heights

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 2

Plot: Presently the storyline of the sequel is unknown, although it appears likely to involve Ethan Hunt and Luther Stickwell
Players: Tom Cruise, Ving Rhames
Director: TBD
Status: In development
Release Date: TBD
Latest Rumors: Both Cruise and Rhames have said that they'll be in the next MI. Cruise hinted recently that Paul Newman may be involved. Oliver Stone could be named as director after the production company (owned by Cruise) had a falling out with original director Brian De Palma
Inside Buzz: The first film did remarkably well considering many found the plot convoluted to follow. Look for big buz here

PLANET OF THE APES 2

Plot: After an alien ship turns up with a virus that begins killing children, a group of astronauts investigate the spacecraft in hopes of finding a vaccine for the plague, which they discover was sent by apes to rid the planet of humans
Players: TBD (possibly Arnold Schwarzenegger)
Director: Chris Columbus
Status: In development
Release Date: TBD
Latest Rumors: Script rewrites continue
Inside Buzz: Another possible franchise for Fox, which appears to be taking a slow approach to make sure they get things right

SCREAM 2

Plot: Sydney tries to forget the terror of the first film, but new horrors seem to be re-appearing at college
Players: Courtney Cox, Neve Campbell, David Arquette, Jerry O'Connell
Director: Wes Craven
Status: Ready for release
Release Date: December 12
Latest Rumors: Jada Pinkett bites the dust in the film's opening
Inside Buzz: Since they're already working on *Scream 3*, the inside buzz is pretty irrelevant

SPECIES 2: BIRTHING

Plot: While in space, an astronaut becomes infected with alien DNA and returns to Earth with a new mission: score with human chicks. A new Sil is developed to track down and stop the male human/alien hybrid
Players: Natasha Henstridge, Michael Madsen, James Cromwell, Mykelti Williamson
Director: Peter Medak
Status: In production
Release Date: May 1998
Latest Rumors: The Sil creature may now go by the name of Eve. Filming was recently completed at the University of Maryland
Inside Buzz: Whether or not audiences would have put up with the poorly constructed plot of the first *Species* film without Henstridge baring her assets is the big question facing the sequel

SPHERE

Plot: Drawing from the Michael Crichton novel about an alien ship discovered beneath the ocean and a group of scientists that enters the craft and discovers it's not exactly what it appears to be
Players: Dustin Hoffman, Sharon Stone, Samuel L. Jackson, Peter Coyote
Director: Barry Levinson
Status: In production
Release Date: Spring 1998
Latest Rumors: Many changes in the production crew could delay the film. All water sequences have been filmed and work will soon move to effects post-production
Inside Buzz: The aliens underwater concept has already been done (*The Abyss*), but *Sphere* should rely more on story and less on water

STAR TREK 9

Plot: The further adventures of Picard and Co. aboard the starship Enterprise. The theme of the film is said to rely heavily on Picard's background
Players: Patrick Stewart, Brent Spiner, Jonathan Frakes
Director: Jonathan Frakes
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: Thanksgiving 1998
Latest Rumors: Stewart is looking for a storyline that is lighter in tone. Stewart may bow in as executive producer
Inside Buzz: Odd-numbered *Star Trek* films usually do poorly although this will be the first "odd" *Trek* without Shatner

STAR WARS: EPISODE ONE

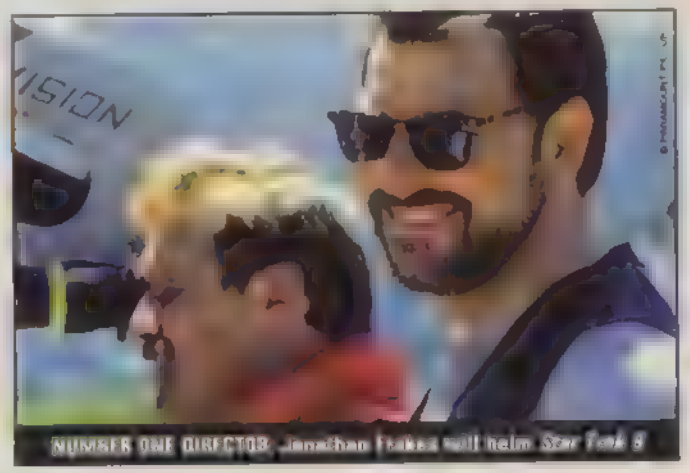
Plot: Lucas takes the helm to oversee the rise of the Empire and the fall of the old Republic. The opening chapter focuses on 8-year-old Anakin and teenage queen Padme Naberrie Amidala on a collision course with a destiny that includes Obi-Wan Kenobi and a couple of guys named Darth
Players: Liam Neeson, Natalie Portman, Ewan McGregor, Samuel L. Jackson, Jake Lloyd, Ahmed Best, Pernilla August
Director: George Lucas
Status: Post-production
Release Date: May 1999
Latest Rumors: Names of the prequel characters (Jar Jar Binks, Darth Sidious, Mace Windu, etc.) recently appeared as Web sites linking to the Lucasfilm Episode One home page. Ahmed Best's character, Jar Jar, may be a reptile with a huge role in the film
Inside Buzz: $500,000,000. Easy. The only question is which studio gets to cash the checks

SUPERMAN (UNTITLED)

Plot: Essentially following the *Death of Superman* storyline (or, more accurately, continuing it), the Man of Steel must face the combined powers of villain Brainiac and his monstrous creation Doomsday in a fight to the finish
Players: Nicolas Cage
Director: Tim Burton
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: Summer 1998
Latest Rumors: Michael Keaton may cameo as Batman. The production crew was laid off due to a changed start date. The new Superman suit will be translucent in areas that allow full view of the hero's internal workings (yech!). Pittsburgh, rather than NYC, is used as Metropolis
Inside Buzz: Warner execs hope Tim Burton can energize another superhero franchise, but everyone knows the film's success will depend on whether or not audiences buy Cage as Superman

TOMORROW NEVER DIES

Plot: A billionaire media mogul in the mold of Rupert Murdoch looks to create World War III in the name of corporate profits. James Bond, in his 18th big-screen outing, must overcome the media machine at his adversary's disposal to expose him and his operation
Players: Pierce Brosnan, Michelle Yeoh, Jonathan Pryce, Teri Hatcher, Desmond Llewelyn, Samantha Bond
Director: Roger Spottiswoode



NUMBER ONE DIRECTOR: Jonathan Frakes will helm *Star Trek 9*

A STRONG BOND: Pierce Brosnan and Michelle Yeoh in *Tomorrow*

Status: Ready for release
Release Date: December 19
Latest Rumors: Tensions have been high between director Spottiswoode and leading lady Jeri Hatcher. The final budget for the film may end up north of $100 million.
Inside Buzz: The last Bond film while nowhere near the league of classics like *Dr. No* and *Goldfinger*, still managed to churn up more than $300 million world wide. Expect *Tomorrow* to follow the same course.

TWISTER 2

Plot: Information is sketchy at this point, but it's believed the sequel to the 1996 stormfest will involve a strange weather pattern capable of spawning an entirely new category of storm. The government relies on our intrepid storm chasers to study the phenomenon and create a device to predict or stop the formation of monster storms.
Players: TBD
Director: TBD
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: TBD
Latest Rumors: Helen Hunt is ready to go for the sequel, the rest of the cast will be new. Look for twisters marching through main street of a large city.
Inside Buzz: Another movie that can't avoid a sequel. Our first suggestion: make sure it has a story this time. Oh, and get rid of those evil corporate tornado chasers.

THE WILD, WILD WEST

Plot: Will Smith and George Clooney play James West and Artemus Gordon from the '60s TV show starring Robert Conrad.
Players: Will Smith, George Clooney
Director: Barry Sonnenfeld
Status: Pre-production
Release Date: 1998
Latest Rumors: Conrad says he'd like to do a cameo.
Inside Buzz: Will the Western be able to score big with audiences if it doesn't muscle it in time for Will Smith's favorite weekend in early July? More importantly, will there be any aliens?

U.S. MARSHALS

Plot: A sequel to *The Fugitive* without the fugitive. *U.S. Marshals* collects the team sent to hunt down Harrison Ford in *The Fugitive* and sends them on the trail of a new bad guy played by Wesley Snipes.
Players: Tommy Lee Jones, Wesley Snipes, Joe Pantoliano, Robert Downey Jr.
Director: Stuart Baird
Status: In production
Release Date: 1998
Latest Rumors: Principal photography is under way in Chicago where a plane crash sequence is being filmed.
Inside Buzz: Can the clever writing of Jones' Gerard character carry a movie without the strength of Harrison Ford and his quest for the one-armed man?

THE X-FILES MOVIE

Plot: The movie that's supposed to be up the mythology arc of the hit television series. Expect aliens, cigarette-smoking men and answers to some of the show's bigger questions.
Players: David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Martin Landau, Mitch Pileggi, William B. Davis
Director: Rob Bowman
Status: Post-production
Release Date: Summer 1998
Latest Rumors: The movie will resolve a "cliffhanger" set up by the finale of the series' fifth season. Terry O'Quinn will appear as a new FBI agent and will *not* be reprising his *Millennium* role.
Inside Buzz: All the answers that *X-Files* fans have been waiting for are just eight bucks away, but will production values be big league or just bigger on theater screens?

ORDER YOUR BACK ISSUES TODAY!

CINESCAPE	#0	August '94	36pg preview edition — Sold Out
	#1	October '94	Star Trek: Generations — $25.00
	#2	Nov. '94 through #4 Jan. '95; #8 May '95	Sold Out
	#5	February '95	Star Wars/ Aliens — $10.00
	#6	March '95	The Next Star Wars–RARE! — $40.00
	#7	April '95	Bruce Willis/ Die Hard — $15.00
	#9	June '95	Batman Forever/ Apollo 13 — $10.00
	#10	July '95	Judge Dredd/ 12 Monkeys — $10.00
	#11	August '95	The X-Files/ Sandra Bullock — Sold Out
	#12	September '95	James Bond/ Superman — $15.00
	#13	October '95	Deep Space 9/ Voyager — $8.00
	#14	November '95	James Bond/ George Lucas — $10.00
	#15	December '95	Alien 4/ Broken Arrow — $10.00
	#16	January '96	X-Files/ Tarantino/ Jumanji — $15.00
	#17	February '96	Star Wars/ Crow 2/ Stallone — $10.00
	#18	March '96	James Cameron/ T2 3-D — $8.00
	#19	April '96	Independence Day — $12.00
	#20	May '96	Sum. Preview/ Star Trek 8 — $10.00
	#21	June '96	Tom Cruise/ Twister — $8.00
	#22	July '96	Schwarzenegger/ Alien 4 — $8.00
	#23	August '96	Gillian Anderson/ X-Files — $20.00
	#24	Sept./Oct. '96	Star Trek Anniversary — $10.00
	#25	Nov./Dec. '96	Patrick Stewart/First Contact — $8.00
	#26	Jan./Feb. '97	Most Influential SciFi Films — $6.00
	#27	Mar./April '97	George Lucas/ Star Wars — $6.00
	#28	May/June '97	Summer Movie Preview — $6.00
	#29	July/Aug. '97	Batman & Robin — $6.00
	#30	Sept./Oct. '97	Fall TV Preview/X-Files — $6.00
	#31	Nov./Dec. '97	Next Star Wars/X-Files movie — $6.00

CINESCAPE SPECIALS

#12	Nov. '96 and Jan. '97		Sold Out
#3	November '97	Movie Aliens	$15.00
#4	January '98	The X-Files	$15.00

MOVIE & TV SPECIALS

Babylon 5	$20.00
Congo, The Mask	ea. $8.00
GoldenEye	$8.00
Independence Day	$10.00

POSTAGE AND HANDLING

U.S.	$2.00 each
CANADA	$3.00 each
MEXICO	$3.00 each
FOREIGN	$5.00 each

Pay by check or money order
U.S. funds only (Sorry, no credit card orders.)
Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery

Make check payable to:
CINESCAPE Back Issues
1920 Highland Suite 220
Lombard, IL 60187
call to check or reserve
(630)916-1744 ext. 214

Bad Connection

Contact *handles an E.T. encounter with disappointing results*

by annabelle villaneuva

I wish someone had told me Rob Lowe has a small role in *Contact* (Warner). Because no one did, I had great expectations for the film—it seemed like it would be such an intelligent movie based on intellectual ideas and starring brainy actors. But if I'd had some warning about Lowe, the limp nudge-nudge, wink-wink satire in his performance as Richard Rank, the leader of a powerful conservative religious coalition (what, did Jodie Foster feel guilty about her *Hotel New Hampshire* buddy's sagging career and pull some strings?), wouldn't have been so jarring. I would have already anticipated my thudding disappointment.

And *Contact* really is the most frustrating kind of cinematic disappointment: one of those movies that carries the ingredients of a masterpiece, but still manages to completely miss the mark. Based on Carl Sagan's best-selling 1985 novel, the film had endless potential—innovative director Robert Zemeckis, fresh from *Forrest Gump*'s wild success; dazzling special effects; a rare performance by Foster; a storyline that addresses both the complex balance between science and religion and the ultimate power of the human spirit. Instead, those lofty building blocks are razed by an amazingly pedestrian script, simple-minded caricatures, heavy-handed direction and several dumb left turns. Lowe's silly cameo being only one example.

The movie does begin promisingly enough, as images of a gorgeous, star-filled galaxy dissolve into a shot of a little girl's eye. The inquisitive girl, Ellie Arroway, is devoted to connecting with faraway voices on her Ham radio. When her beloved father dies, her search for answers thrusts her into the world of science. By the time she grows up, of course, her quest for truth has manifested itself in an astronomy career and an obsession to seek out extraterrestrial messages through massive satellites.

Naturally, no one needs a

Lowe Blows

Former Brat-Packer Rob Lowe has made a specialty of walk-ons: He appeared as "hoodlum" in *Mulholland Falls*, and a cameo as "guy at stag party" was cut from *Austin Powers*.

physics degree from M.I.T. to figure out that Arroway (played by Foster) eventually makes "contact." What's harder to figure out is why screenwriter Michael Goldenberg makes her journey so shockingly predictable. As the story unfolds, Arroway's work is continually threatened by skeptics trying to

pull the funding plug; in each instance, our heroine manages to save her research just in the nick of time. Once she finally does pick up extraterrestrial radio signals from the distant star Vega, she's hounded by global controversy and disruptive government interference. Central to this opposition is the distrustful U.S. National Security Advisor, played by a smarmy James Woods with all the depth and nuance of Smidely Whiplash.

The hubbub's mainly due to the fact that the space transmissions contain blueprints for a machine capable of intergalactic transport. As plans to build the machine are hatched, Ellie wages war against a back-stabbing former mentor, Tom Skerritt, to be chosen as the machine's voyager. Director Robert Zemeckis makes the mistake of illustrating the ensuing media circus with cameos by countless television news personalities, including Bryant Gumbel and virtually every CNN reporter and anchor. Even more irritating is the *Forrest Gump*-ian splicing of real Bill Clinton press conferences around the action, at one point Skerritt even shares the podium with the chief executive.

Instead of helping suspend disbelief, this intense clobbering of "reality" manages to be an irritating distraction.

By the time we're introduced to Foster's [illegible] Howard Hughes-like billionaire benefactor S.R. Hadden, John Hurt, looking like James Bond villain Blofeld, the movie's veered hopelessly out of control. Things aren't helped by the ice-cold chemistry between Foster and Matthew McConaughey, who plays her former flame, a famous religious scholar and presidential advisor. The two weakly dance the religion-versus-science, he's-a-believer, he's-a-skeptic tango, stranding the movie's theological subtext on a continually simplistic level.

Still, *Contact* occasionally provides glimpses into what could have been. The special effects, particularly the space sequences and the giant, atom-shaped transport, are spectacular, as is the scene when Foster prepares to be launched into space—a note-perfect portrayal of fear and tension before the unknown. Plus, the haunting clanging sound effects created for the extraterrestrial transmission are as memorable as one imagines the real thing ever could be. But as soon as the film starts yelling, preparing the audience for the big payoff, it manages to disappoint again with a boring, *Close Encounters* at Club Med resolution. Sadly, *Contact*'s promise never does manage to get off the ground.

★★

CRASH AND BURN

Take a far-fetched concept, turn it into a trite script riddled with ridiculous dialogue, lots of explosions and shoot-outs, and you've got a pathetic excuse for an action movie not even top-notch actors can save.

Welcome to *Con Air* (Buena Vista).

Brought to the screen by the folks responsible for *The Rock* and *Days of Thunder*, *Con Air* proves yet again that action movies and any trace of originality are increasingly incompatible.

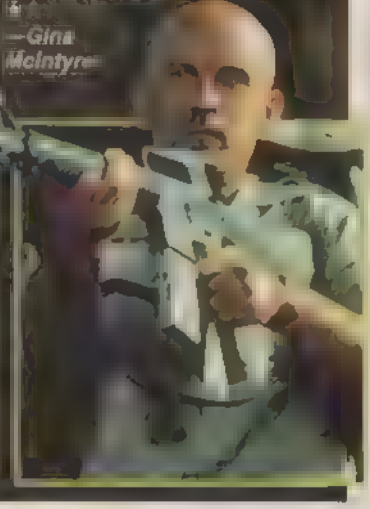
This time out, the unwitting good guy is Cameron Poe (Nicolas Cage), a convict and former Army Ranger who's serving out the end of his sentence for involuntary manslaughter. But it won't be an easy flight to freedom for the rehabilitated con as Poe is trapped in anarchy's midst after a host of criminal masterminds hijacks the plane that is transporting them to a new prison. Of course, our hero survives the requisite fights, chases and crash landings by focusing on his love for his wife and child. And when the going gets tough, he inexplicably sacrifices his chance to safely return to his loved ones in order to stay aboard the plane to protect his diabetic former cellmate and a female prison guard. Then, moments after he is finally re-united with his family near the end of the film, he takes off again on another ludicrous motorcycle chase, leaving the little girl and her mother standing on the street.

Far too long for its own good, littered with pathetic one-liners and melodramatic [illegible] running in slow motion against [illegible], *Con Air* wastes the considerable talents of its cast.

For those of us who loved Cage's [illegible] *Moonstruck* [illegible] *Wild at Heart* is far more memorable. John Malkovich meanwhile, surely can find better roles than criminal ringleader Cyrus the Virus, and any actor could easily handle John Cusack's generic U.S. Marshal.

The movie's sole saving grace is Steve Buscemi's fascinating serial killer Garland Greene, whose 15 minutes on screen are undeniably the film's most entertaining. A character worthy of his own story, the creepy Greene is the one guy we'd love to see return from this flight, though not in *Con Air 2*.

—Gina McIntyre



Delusions of Grandeur

What if a nutty conspiracy theorist was actually spot-on about one of his far-out accusations? What would the CIA, the NSA, the military industrial complex, the Warren Commission or whoever do about it?

That's the premise behind *Conspiracy Theory* (Warner), and the answer is simple: they'd try to kill him.

Sounds simple enough, but rather than just putting a bullet into the conspiracy nut's head as he steps out of his apartment in the morning, the bad guys take the killing-a-flea-with-a-baseball-bat approach, allowing the nut to slip away, bounce around a bit and, in the process, draw attention to the conspiracy.

The result is inevitable: our hero, the loon, a cab driver who likes to harangue his passengers with theories on assassinations and romance [illegible] of the lamb. Every time he shows his face in public, the mysterious bad guys drop out of helicopters on top of him, spatter the building behind him with bullets, or zoom around the corner in big black cars in a vain effort to mow him down.

The first person to take note of all these shenanigans is a young lawyer in the district attorney's office, played by Julia Roberts. And since the nut-hero is Mel Gibson, all he has to do is downshift his mania quivering long enough to gaze longingly at Roberts and she joins his side.

The villain here is another big star, Patrick Stewart, whose minions kidnap Gibson so that Stewart can torture him in a straight ripoff of the famous "Is it safe?" scene from *Marathon Man*. Except this time, our hero isn't saved by a dauphertous William Devane, he instead escapes by munching on Stewart's schnoz.

Now, with Roberts garnering some inside dope on the guys with the bandage on his nose and Gibson having enough flashbacks to qualify for veteran's benefits, the pieces all start to fall clumsily into place. Gibson, we learn, isn't just a conspiracy theorist after all. Roberts is tied to the conspiracy herself, and Stewart is, well, a mad scientist. Surprised? We didn't think so.

Believe it or not, Gibson, the hammy star of the *Lethal Weapon* trilogy and *Maverick*, plays it straight here. Though rife with comic possibilities, *Conspiracy Theory* is utterly lacking in a sense of humor. Roberts, meanwhile, does nothing beyond look good. She flips her long locks and stares intently, and lets Gibson do all the talking.

When it comes right down to it, *Conspiracy Theory* is really nothing more than one extended chase. The intricacies of the plot, such as they are, reveal themselves not clue by clue but in one blathering monologue by Stewart. Gibson escapes from hospitals and burning buildings and trailer-snarled bridges and sealed rooms. He spends much of the film speeding around New York City in his souped-up taxi cab, going [illegible] like the plot, absolutely nowhere.

Warner Bros. had grand hopes for *Conspiracy Theory*, and why not? Few big-budget Hollywood productions can boast a pedigree that includes three A-list stars and Richard Donner behind the camera. The mediocre result is almost as hard to swallow as the hero's way-out theories. ★★

Douglas Perry

Super Mangled

Once there was a time when the stories and characters of popular comic books couldn't effectively be brought to the big screen. The film technology of previous eras couldn't do justice to the majestic vistas or dynamic madness of a Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko or other comic creators.

But of late, there's been a growing opinion among comics biz insiders that their medium may fall by the wayside because their film counterparts can't only duplicate what appears on the page (at least visually), but they can do it better.

Steel (Warner), however, should make these comic industry insiders breath a sigh of relief.

Here's the deal: John Henry Irons (Shaquille O'Neal) leaves the military after a weapon test involving lasers goes awry, courtesy of an over-ambitious soldier named Burke (former Brat Packer Judd Nelson). The comely soldier Sparks (Annabeth Gish), a colleague whom Irons has some affection for, is crippled because of the mishap.

Disgusted with the military's handling of the mishap, Irons resigns and returns to his old neighborhood. Meanwhile, a court-martialed Burke plots his revenge. He steals the plans for those previously mentioned weapons and is intent on developing and selling them to evil people all around the world. Conveniently for Irons, the crazed Burke enlists a gang from Irons' neighborhood to test the weapon.

Inevitably, Irons crosses paths with the gang, recognizes the weapons and decides to become a crime fighter. Helping him is Sparks—in her new hi-tech wheelchair—and a grizzled old junkyard owner played by Richard Roundtree (*Shaft*).

The three combine their skills, and out of various junkyard debris construct a rubbery steel-plated suit for Irons. *Ta-da!*

This flimsy story plods forward, with Shaq's performance as stiff as his crime-fighting suit. And lest you forget that the star of the show is a professional b-ball player, there is a running gag about John Henry Iron's inability to make simple shots on the schoolyard basketball court (until the end...when it *really* counts).

Director Kenneth Johnson (the *Alien Nation* and Incredible Hulk TV movies) delivers a film that is passable entertainment for young kids but is neither exciting nor original. The action is flat, the performances strained, the payoff anything but. But Johnson and the film's writers can't shoulder all of the blame—Shaq also served as the movie's co-executive producer.

★☆☆☆☆—*Frank Kurtz*

Ship of Fools

Speed 2 (Fox) both is and isn't a remake of its hit predecessor. Like the original, it is another tale of a lone psycho genius who battles spunky Sandra Bullock and a stoic LAPD cop for control of a booby-trapped passenger vessel. Unlike the original, it isn't fast-paced, clever or entertaining.

The sequel switches the locale from the streets of Los Angeles to the waters of the Caribbean. Annie (Bullock) is trying to enjoy a vacation getaway with her new beau, SWAT daredevil Alex (Jason Patric). (Keanu Reeves' absence is explained in a hasty aside, making it clear there wasn't much time for a rewrite after he wisely declined to do the sequel.) Their romantic idyll is interrupted when the nefarious Geiger (Willem Dafoe), a disgruntled computer hacker, sabotages the ocean liner they're on, forcing most of the passengers to abandon ship. But Alex, Annie and a handful of other passengers—all of them crudely sketched caricatures—are trapped on the out-of-control cruise ship, which is moving full-steam-ahead towards an explosive rendezvous with an oil tanker.

As ludicrous as the first movie was at times, it won audiences over with its memorable characters and muscular direction. The sequel is even more ridiculous, but it lacks any sort of charm to compensate for the implausibilities of the plot. Bullock and Patric lack any screen chemistry whatsoever, perhaps because they seem to be acting in different movies: An over-the-top Bullock plays everything for screwball laughs, while Patric emulates Keanu Reeves' deadpan style. Willem Dafoe gives a game, pop-eyed performance in the cackling bad-guy role, but the part is so poorly written that the character is ultimately more pathetic than frightening.

Of course, the actors can always resort to the "We were just following orders" defense, pointing the primary finger of blame at director Jan De Bont. And they'd be right to do so. De Bont seems to have forgotten how to shoot and cut an action movie—the opening sequence features a superfluous chase scene (with Tim Conway on hand making a vain stab at comic relief) done almost entirely in oppressive, disorienting closeups. Even the knack for mindless spectacle De Bont displayed in *Twister* has abandoned him. The climactic, CG-heavy explode-a-rama comes off like a misfired slapstick gag: It's *Airport* and *The Poseidon Adventure* by way of *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* and *Herbie Goes Bananas*. Like the rest of the film, it's twice as big as anything in the original, and half as good. ★★☆☆☆

—*Steve Hockensmith*

Super Hell Raiser

In the running for last summer's worst superhero movie is *Spawn* (New Line) based on the Image comics series created by Todd McFarlane.

In spite of a barrage of cutting-edge special effects, the film feels cheap and looks rushed. It's also saddled with a banal script and the obligatory bad acting. I'm a quickie comic book adaptation.

Spawn is the story of a mercenary named Al Simmons who is tired of killing people. He wants to settle down with his fiancee, who apparently has no idea what Al does for a living. Al's boss, Jason Wynn (played with a hilarious cartoony evil voice by Martin Sheen), isn't happy about it. He sends Al on a suicide mission. Al dies and goes to hell, the guy's a killer after all.

Five years later, he returns to Earth as the flame-scarred superhuman creature called Spawn. Also on Earth and conspiring to bring the world to an end is a demon called either the Clown or the Violator (John Leguizamo, depending on what shape he's taking at the time).

The Clown tells us that Spawn is intended to lead the forces of hell into a battle with heaven. A mysterious stranger named Cogliostro (Nicol Williamson) is hanging around the proceedings and attempts to play upon Spawn's humanity to turn him against Malebolgia (a classy name for Satan).

I must say, this bigger-than-life story has potential, a story about a man trying to find his soul and redeem himself by facing down the evil of evils.

Forget it.

That story is reduced to a series of overdone, computer-generated scenes. As a result, the film has zero suspense, and even less character development. In fact, some CG effects seem to be there for the sole purpose of stopping the film dead. For example, there's a scene where the Violator turns his own head into a balloon and pops it. The hammy Martin Sheen makes a face like he's seen this before and is really sick of it. I suppose this is supposed to be kind of funny.

It's like they gave the reins of the movie to a bunch of effects guys and told them not to worry about telling a story. Don't get me wrong. The computer graphics look good (with the exception of scenes set in hell that look very rushed). It's just that they look like, well, like computer graphics as opposed to real-world objects. That wouldn't be a problem if the whole film had taken place in another world, but with the exception of Hell, this is the same world you and I are supposed to be living in.

Creator Todd McFarlane long maintained that *Spawn* the comic was intended for 12 year-old boys. He's never claimed it to be some great piece of art — and he was right.

Spawn the movie tries to be more than that, and it fails miserably. It ends up being a showcase for the latest computer graphics and techniques, only qualifying as a movie because it lasts for nearly 90 minutes.

★☆☆☆☆ – *F K*

Class Struggle

The rapid deterioration of public education is becoming fertile mining ground for Hollywood studios looking to do movies with a message. *Stand and Deliver*, *Lean on Me* and *Dangerous Minds* all deal with the battles public-school teachers face each and every day in their quests to make a difference in the lives of their students.

As *187* (Warner) begins, it would seem to fall into the same category. Set in a notoriously dangerous New York City public school, the story unfolds as high school science teacher Trevor Garfield (Samuel L. Jackson) struggles to reach a class of students involved in gangs and drugs.

But the movie quickly departs from the standard inspirational tale when Garfield is brutally stabbed by a student. He re-emerges 15 months later as a substitute teacher in an equally perilous Los Angeles high school, but the attack has left him more than just physically scarred. Once a dedicated professional, Garfield is now part educator and part bloodthirsty vigilante who embraces an an-eye-for-an-eye, vengeance-is-mine philosophy.

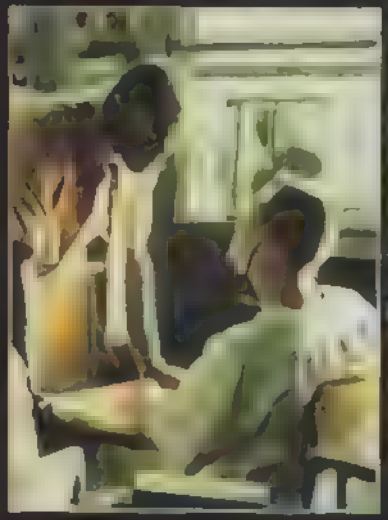
More *Falling Down* than *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *187* offers memorable performances throughout from Jackson as well as the group of newcomers playing the students. Directed by *Waterworld* helmer Kevin Reynolds, who has abandoned pricey action fare for more personal projects, the movie raises some interesting and disturbing questions—the kind that cannot easily be answered. Such as: How does an environment become so dysfunctional that right and wrong become virtually indistinguishable? How are teachers supposed to

work in schools that are rife with apathy, racial tension and perpetual confrontation—where sometimes their very lives are threatened by the students they're supposed to be teaching?

There are no heroes in *187*, and certainly no happy ending. Instead, good teachers turn bad or give up, driven to maddening frustration by a school system more like a war zone than a place of learning, a desolate wasteland where the seeds of knowledge could never take root and grow.

The film certainly deals in clichés, presenting an obvious problem as an indictment without offering any alternatives. But even if the film, penned by a former teacher, can be classified as Hollywood hyperbole, at the very least it is thought-provoking as well. It forces audiences to consider what can be done to reverse the downward spiral of public education before it's too late.

★★★☆☆—G.M.



Cheap Shot

Steven Seagal [illegible] Tibetan holy man recognized him as a reincarnated lama last year (we're not kidding, folks), the pony-tailed action star has seemed happier, more confident, more in tune with his softer side.

Which means that when he kicks butt nowadays, he does so with a wan smile and a faraway look slathered across his face. And it isn't just wanton violence anymore. A Steven Seagal film now sports a *message*—in his latest, *Fire Down Below* (Warner), it's "Clean up the environment, or I'll whack you with a big stick."

Why didn't Al Gore think of that?

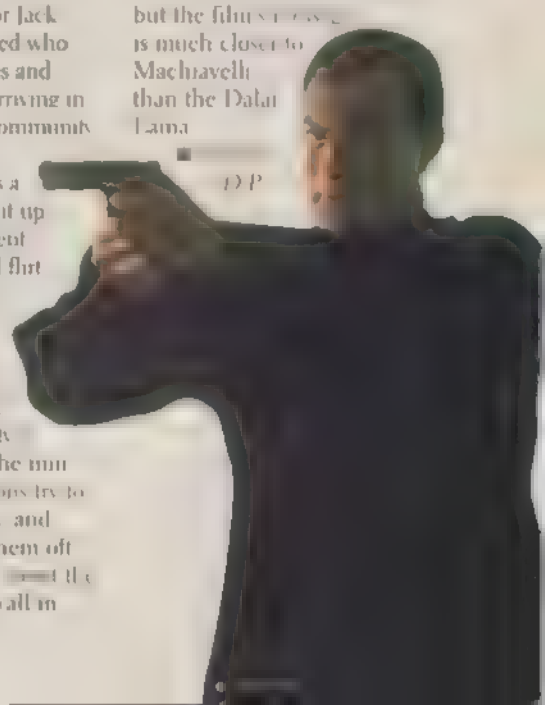
The set-up is pretty straightforward. An evil coal-mining corporation run by a redneck (Kris Kristofferson) is dumping tons of toxic waste into abandoned mines, which is slowly poisoning the good people of a nearby hamlet. The Environmental Protection Agency sent a field agent to take water samples, and the poor schmoe ended up with a bullet in the head. Which means this is a job for Jack Taggert (Seagal), a Fed who plays by his own rules and always gets results. Arriving in the small southern community dressed all in black, Taggert shows us he's a nice guy by chatting it up with the town's resident mental defective and flirting with all the apple-cheeked girls. (His two oft-repeated come-on lines are "That's a pretty name" and "You're real pretty.")

Needless to say, the mining company [illegible] to run him out of town, and Taggert must ward them off with repeated blows [illegible] head and shoulders (all in [illegible] suggesting the [illegible] Seagal [illegible] he used to be). Of course, when Taggert isn't punching out droopy-eyed hillbillies, playing chicken in a pickup truck with an 18-wheeler or sniffing around dusty old mines, he's romancing the local outcast—a beautiful strawberry blonde who killed her daddy when she was 16 for, you know, mysterious reasons.

The highlight of the film comes about midway through, when Taggert marches into the town's church, takes the pulpit and offers up a fire-breathing sermon on the evils of corporate America and the value of taking responsibility for the welfare of your community and children. To say the least, it's a show stopper.

The rest is anticlimax. When the townsfolk join Taggert in his quest for a greener valley, the corporation pulls out the big guns, and Taggert meets fire with fire. Seagal's new hero talks the talk of a pacifist Buddhist *lotus*, but the film's [illegible] is much closer to Machiavelli than the Dalai Lama.

—D.P.



A Whole New Trek

Gene Roddenberry is back on TV—with Earth: Final Conflict

by edward gross

The most surprising thing about *Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict* is *not* that the syndicated series came into being in the first place. Just slapping the late *Star Trek* creator's moniker on an idea is enough in itself to provide commercial viability. What's truly amazing is that, more than 20 years after Roddenberry fashioned the concept and a half-dozen years since his death, the new show is completely in sync with the humanistic message that was so much a part of Roddenberry's work—*and* it doesn't feel dated.

For executive producer David Kirschner, such sentiment—and the early Nielsen ratings that back it up—is reassuring, particularly since he has been confronted by critics who claim that if it doesn't take place in space, it can't be Gene Roddenberry.

"Give the guy a break," Kirschner offers. "It's a pretty dangerous thing to put blinders on the creative process. *Star Trek* was a blessing for what it did for [Roddenberry's] life, but also a curse in that it's the only thing that he was really known for. A couple of people [at Tribune Entertainment, the show's production company], were really upset that it wasn't constant spaceships and prosthetics."

The bottom line, certainly in terms of marketing the show, is that Roddenberry did create the series, only he did so back in the early 1970s—long before anyone ever heard of *V* or *Independence Day*. It was a project that languished in his files once he was given the go-ahead by Paramount to relaunch the original *Star Trek* and was discovered by his widow, actress Majel Barrett, when she began putting his papers in order. Seeing the potential in the project—originally called *Battleground Earth*—she hooked up with the well-connected Creative Artists Agency, which in turn led her to Kirschner, whose producing credits include *An American Tail*, *Child's Play*, *The Dreamer of Oz* and the animated miniseries *The Pirates of Darkwater*. "Kind of from that," he muses, "a real friendship was born. She's [become] that keeps the torch alive and kind of smacks me when she thinks I'm moving away from that in any way. What's great is that if I am straying, we have really good conversations, so she can understand why I'm doing this and why I'm going in this direction."

The series, retitled *Earth: Final Conflict* to avoid confusion with L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*, takes place early in the next century, when 71 alien beings known as the Taelons, or Companions, are living among us, using their advanced technology to rule Earth and rid the planet of famine, disease and other plagues. After his wife is killed in an auto-

Gene: Final Project?

Earth: Final Conflict won't be the last Gene Roddenberry concept to hit prime time. Roddenberry's widow, Majel Barrett, says other projects—such as a new version of *The Questor Tapes*—are in the works.

mobile accident—which may or may not have been ordered by the aliens. William Boone (Kevin Kilner) becomes the Commander of Security and Interspecies Relations for the race and is given a Cyber-Viral Implant (CVI) to enhance his mental abilities and presumably make him loyal to the Taelons. What the aliens don't realize is that there is a resistance movement at work, whose members have blocked Boone's CVI to some degree so that he will have free will.

In Kirschner's opinion, the series retains much of what Roddenberry intended. "The essence is absolutely there," he says. "The fact that it takes place a number of years after the Taelons arrived, that the [aliens have] had a profound impact on our society, and that one man, William Boone, must walk this razor's edge between [aliens and] his own species.

But Kirschner isn't interested simply in telling entertaining science-fiction stories. He encourages his writers to tackle controversial ideas. The episode "Miracle," for example, written by *Trek* veteran Dorothy Fontana, features a moment in which Boone uses a computer to overlay the images of Moses, the Buddha, Jesus Christ and the Egyptian Sphinx, and the resulting image is that of a Taelon. The episode focuses on the notion that the aliens have long played a role in established religions on Earth.

On the whole, the episode was well-received by the public, though there were some trying behind-the-scenes wrangles before it was shot and aired. "I had a little problem with it," says Majel Barrett, "and I kept saying, 'Let's not go anywhere near religion,' and somehow or another in its first form I got the impression of religion and God, and that's something Gene never really believed in, talking about 'What God?' Whose God? There's no way you can talk about religion or God without offending somebody. He always talked about belief and faith. We would have planets on *Star Trek* with some kind of engraved images and then it was all right to talk about it. But you still don't put anybody down for it. Since it was all one planet and they all believed in the same thing, you could refer to it. But I've tried to stay, because Gene did, so far away from religion that I was highly skeptical when this came up."

In their discussions regarding the episode, Kirschner pointed to such past *Trek* episodes as "Bread and Circuses," which dealt plainly with Christianity.

"Her point to me," Kirschner relates, "was that because he was a humanist, Gene wouldn't touch religion. I said, 'How can you talk about someone being a humanist and ignore the fact that man has needed to believe in something much greater than ourselves from the time we climbed out of the primal ooze? We went back and forth on that and she said, 'If you feel it, I want you to do it, but I don't agree with it.' But we did it and the response has been fantastic. To tell you the truth, all I really wanted to talk about was adulation, and the fact that overnight this little two-bit organization called the Church of the Companions has hundreds of thousands of members. It's the way that Christianity grew; it is what we are. That, to me, is what's fascinating and what makes this show such a creatively fulfilling one."

Barrett, however, is adamant that the development of the chief characters is just as important as any challenging ideas or themes being played out. "Early on, we were a little behind on some of the characters," she admits. "I've heard words like 'cardboard' used in reference to them, and I have a tendency to a certain degree to agree, except that I know what happens in the later episodes, so it doesn't hold true.

One episode fitting Barrett's criteria has Boone, just months after his wife's death, connecting with a woman he believes he'd once been madly in love with. They reignite their passion for one another until Boone learns that he had actually never met the woman before. "When his CVI was put in," says the producer, "she was used in a test program. Basically, this is a woman working for the Companions and it is a really interesting piece about a man who is manipulated into believing this relationship was real. He feels so violated when he discovers the truth, it makes for an interesting exploration of his psyche."

The key thing for Kirschner is that while this is new territory, at the same time it feels familiar. "I grew up on *Star Trek*," he says, "and of course I loved it. I think if Majel said, 'Here's another version of *Star Trek* that we want to make,' I would have said I'd watch some episodes, but I don't want to spend a year just doing what's been done before. But the idea of just trying to take what Mr. Roddenberry did and grow it into something else—that's what's interesting." ◆

Men In Tights

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a superhero CD-ROM!

by annabelle villanueva

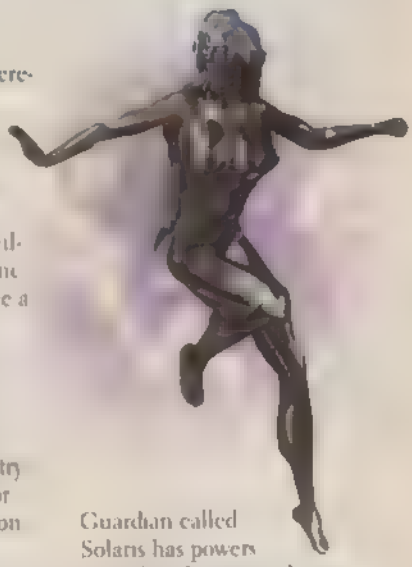
Tough-as-nails heroes, dastardly villains, life or death struggles and wall-to-wall "Pow" and "Rat-tat-tat" Comic books have got everything a good, action-packed computer game has. Yet strangely, game developers have consistently overlooked the superhero genre in favor of military, fantasy and sci-fi scenarios

But now the long-johns and super-powers set is finally getting its due In early 1998, MicroProse Inc.—maker of the popular X Com games—is poised to release *Guardians: Agents of Justice*, the first turn-based strategy game devoted to superheroes

"I've always enjoyed superhero genres and I thought it would be a good game application," game designer Steve Barcia explains According to Barcia, comic books have plenty of elements ready-made for the fast-paced computer games of the '90s. "mass destruction, knocking people through walls, huge explosions and mind control," for example

With this in mind, Barcia created a near-future universe packed with superhuman heroes and a huge rogues gallery of evil foes The game features 11 heroes, the Guardians, who battle three villainous organizations, each one out to destroy the world Once a player chooses one of the Guardians to play (or creates one from a custom character generator), the heroes move through randomly generated, multilevel combat maps and try to destroy the villains' bases or foil their bank robberies, prison breaks and hijackings

While the characters' super-powers can be modified to some degree, in classic comic-book style each hero has an "origin" that establishes parameters for what they can and can't do The



Guardian called Solaris has powers related to the sun and planets, for instance: His special-

hes are a fiery blast, gravity-controlling telekinesis, energy absorption, force fields, "density" (which makes him harder to hurt) and the ability to project light during nighttime missions If a player particularly likes the fire ray, he or she can adjust it to provide "continuing damage," so that a villain who gets hit stays on fire for a while

"The huge host of powers

Superscam

Not all comic books get more valuable as they get older. The "Platinum Edition" of *Superman* #75 (the "Death of Superman" issue), which was worth $205 in 1993, now goes for $50 or less

helps make the game unique," Barcia says. "There are a total of about 50 or 60 powers in the game of which a good 15 or 20 have a host of modifiers so you can change the way they operate. You have set in development points and can choose which power you can have, then you can also turn these on and off on the fly. There's a strategic reason [for not] turning on all the masteries—for example, you don't always want armor piercing on because it decreases the strength of the attack, so you should shut it off if your weapon is already strong enough to go through armor."

The game's 40 villains (who are broken down into three categories: troopers, minions and arch-villains) also use the various skills for their own apocalyptic purposes. "There's a ninja, a robot that flies around and can do mind control and a flying mutant with ice blast power," Barcia adds. "There's a few powers the villains have that the heroes can't have, and there's one hidden character who has all the powers."

Additionally, *Guardians* provides character development and a subtle role-playing element. As the game progresses, heroes accrue more "fame" by defeating villains, which in turn allows them to buy new powers or improve the ones they already possess.

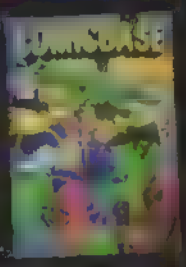
Surprisingly, Barcia claims he's not really a fan of comic books, the prime medium for superhero adventures. Instead, he worked with superhero stereotypes floating around pop culture. "I just tried to hit upon each of the stereotypical [classes of superheroes] that are common themes in both America in Japan," he says. "I just looked at the type of characters anyone could identify with and tried not to stay with anything obscure. I wanted to hit that full spread of characters, so we have a werewolf character, a cyber-knight character, a hunter who's good at tracking down people."

"I was not trying to copy comic books," Barcia continues. "It's like taking the fantasy genre and making [a game out of it]. I took [comic-book superheroes] as the theme, not as the guiding light. Other than that, the primary focus was wanting a really fun tactical combat game with a superhero theme."

Creating such a game wasn't without its challenges. Because of the size of the character templates and power modifications, the game became pretty unwieldy early on. "At one time it was just humongous," he says. "We had something like 750,000 frames of animation, which we cut way back because we wanted to fit it onto a single CD."

Still, the huge amount of character data ultimately adds to the game's playability. Because the roles can be customized and changed, each game really can be much different. Barcia says MicroProse is shooting for about a 20-hour playing time. "We want you to be able to get through it and get a sense of completion but be able to play it again and again," he says. ◆

Funny Book Money



True comic-book collectors treat their comics as though they're worth their weight in gold, carefully bagging and storing each and every precious issue. And, in at least a few cases, collectible comic books *are* worth their weight in gold. Just ask anyone lucky enough to have *Action Comics* #1 stashed away somewhere.

Now serious comic-book fans can manage their collections with equal fervor, using a CD-ROM to keep track of their holdings just like slick Wall Street stockbrokers do their financial portfolios. Human Computing's ComicBase 3.0 Master Edition is an inventory system covering upwards of 33,300 titles from more than 309 different publishers spanning five decades of comic history. The CD-ROM contains extensive background information and color graphics (and even the occasional theme song) for virtually every comic character from Superman to Brother Power the Geek. It includes a detailed price list for about 70,000 individual issues—even special or autographed editions—listed according to their conditions. It also charts how their values have changed over the years. And its built-in inventory system comes equipped with a database allowing users to create and print price labels, inventory reports and buy/sell lists.

Sound like a labor of love? It is. Human Computing founder Peter Bickford, an Apple Computers veteran and life-long comic fan, designed the program for himself. Once he realized he was on to something, he revised it for commercial viability. "My idea was to use multimedia to illustrate and tie the whole comic world together, letting users see the connections between different characters and comic titles, and it had to be powerful enough to handle the sheer task of professionally managing a big comic collection," Bickford says. Taking stock of his own comic collection, Bickford made sure to make room for lesser-known independent titles sometimes lost among all the *Batmans* and *Captain Americas*. "I wanted to give the little guys as much coverage as the major ones. When Marvel comes out with their 58th *X* title, I want to give *Lethargic Lad* the same amount of space. So we've covered lots and lots and lots of independent titles," he explains.

That anti-hype mentality extends to the system's pricing structure as well, which is designed for real comic lovers rather than fly-by-night collectors. "We take a longer-term view of the comic industry and comic books than is typical, and that's very much by design. Every comic book that got really, really hyped up, you'll see it go kind of straight up [in value]. Then you'll see, almost inevitably, that it'll go straight down right after that. You can see where long-term value lies. It's a slow-and-steady-wins-the-race kind of thing. I want to talk about the price at which a comic will actually trade hands as opposed to the price at which it will sit up on your wall for another three years."

—*Gina McIntyre*

Love & Rockets

The most devoted fan in sci-fi history pens his own ode to the genre

by steve hockensmith

If you're a science-fiction fan, you've got to love Forrest J Ackerman, a man who has devoted himself to the genre since the time when dreaming about rocketships and Moonmen was almost enough to have a guy sent to the funny farm. A loyal fan of science fiction before it even had a name—the October 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories* that got him hooked advertised itself as "The Magazine of Scientifiction"—Ackerman was a true pioneer. He worked on the first "fanzine," attended the first World Science Fiction Convention in 1939, was the first to publish Ray Bradbury and received the first Hugo Award. Along the way, he also edited the long-running genre magazine *Famous Monsters of Movieland* and created the phrase "sci-fi" (which has irritated some hard-core fans ever since, though they'd have to admit it's a lot catchier than "scientifiction").

One would think that Ackerman's 71-year-old love affair with SF makes him the perfect figure to provide an overview of the genre's long, slow metamorphosis. When science fiction was ignored by the mainstream and relegated to "pulp magazines like *Amazing* and *Astounding*, Ackerman was there. And, decades later, when *Star Wars* finally catapulted the genre to the forefront of the pop-culture consciousness, Ackerman was still there, loving every minute of it.

Forrest J Ackerman's World of Science Fiction (General Publishing Group, $30) culls anecdotes, photos, movie posters and magazine and book covers from a lifetime spent in service to sci-fi. It's a handsome coffee-table book that reproduces many classic images from the genre's past. Unfortunately, Ackerman's accompanying text—which traces the history of SF from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* up to the big-budget blockbusters of today—doesn't provide any new insights to complement the colorful visuals.

If Ackerman wanted to produce a definitive examination of science-fiction's development over the decades, he failed

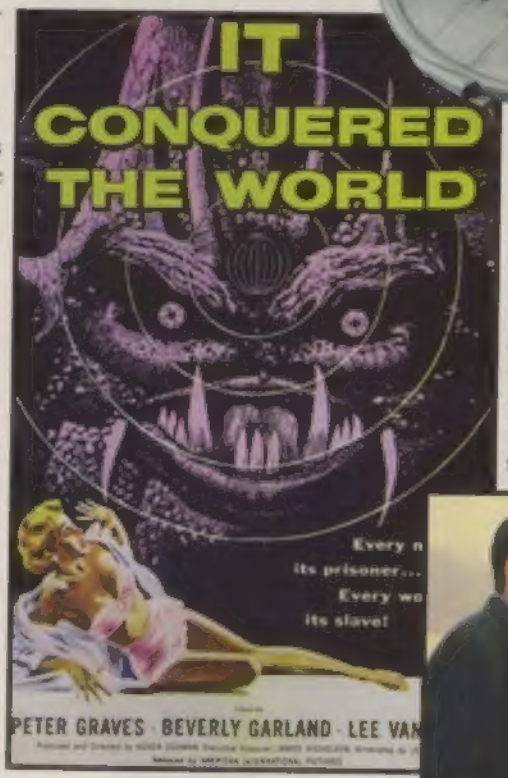
Amazing Story

Though *Amazing Stories* finally gave up the publishing ghost a few years ago, one of its rivals is still around. Founded in 1930, *Astounding Stories* continues today under the name *Analog*

Though his tenure as the genre's überfan spans the pre-pulp, pulp, "New Wave" and modern eras, he doesn't have much to say about how SF writers and readers have changed over the years. And though he straddles the two separate branches of SF fandom—readers of "real" science fiction and fans of mass-media sci-fi like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*—he doesn't acknowledge the divide, let alone examine it seriously.

Much of the book comes off as a simple rehash of sci-fi's greatest hits without enough analysis to put them in context. The chapters on sci-fi movies and TV shows don't provide any information fans haven't read a million times in other places. The chapters on pulp magazines and pioneering SF writers are a little better, mostly because they're enlivened a bit by some of Ackerman's personal reminiscences. A brief section on Ackerman's relationship with sci-fi writer/Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard is a wacky highlight. Unfortunately, such fascinating asides are few and far between.

What Ackerman lacks in insight, he could have made up for in candor. But he skimps on the personal details, too, so the book doesn't work as a memoir, either. So in the end, all *Forrest J Ackerman's World of Science Fiction* has to offer is some really cool pictures. Maybe that would have been plenty for a 9-year-old boy looking for something neat on the newsstands in 1926. But after 71 years, science-fiction fans expect a little bit more. ◆



The Nitpicker's Guide for X-Philes
by Phil Farrand
(Dell Publishing, $12.95)

For a series so reliant on extraterrestrials, far-flung settings, tangled conspiracies, aberrant physiologies, scientific jargon and FBI detective work, it's amazing *The X-Files* ever gets through a scene without continuity errors or gaping plot holes. Luckily, the series' high production standards make blatant flubs a rarity. But the gaffes are out there, and sharp-eyed viewers can amuse themselves by checking to see if Mulder's using his cell phone with the antenna down.

Still, after reading *The Nitpicker's Guide for X-Philes* by Phil Farrand, one wonders if cataloging every oversight or blunder isn't an activity best left to the sort of fans who name their kids "Fox" and "Dana." At almost 400 pages, the book's fussiness is overwhelming. There are summaries of each of the first four seasons' episodes, followed by an examination of unanswered questions, geographical inconsistencies, plot oversights, equipment oddities and continuity and production problems. While die-hard fans might appreciate Farrand addressing major inconsistencies, the book is mostly filled with utterly useless—and boring—minutiae. Readers will find descriptions of locations that really don't exist (Felton, Okla., from "D.P.O." and Queensgate, Ohio, from "Nisei" are two of *several* examples), complaints about the actors' excessive use of fake eyeglasses (the lenses lack prescription curvature) and a long meditation on how Scully took the wrong route from the Minneapolis airport to the FBI field office in "Irresistible."

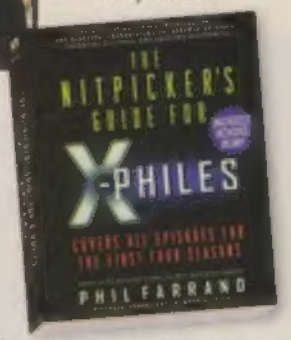
By the time Farrand criticizes Mulder's bubble jet printer for spitting a document out in the manner of a laser jet printer, this non-suspension of disbelief gets tiring. So does the compulsive use of exclamation marks and other punctuation, such as in this excerpt from the entry for "Young at Heart": "Scully hears a squeak, at night, alone, in her apartment, with a maniac on the loose, and she sits there and thinks for a few seconds. Me? Gun in hand! All lights on! Shoot *anything* that twitches!"

Filling out the rest of the volume are trivia questions, quotes, pages devoted to maps of Mulder and Scully's apartments and a "Romance Tote Board" tallying the agents' fleeting displays of affection. Fortunately, Farrand clearly shows he's not taking the nitpicking too seriously. And he does occasionally come up with some interesting supplements to other episode guides on the market, such as the observations that Clyde Bruckman's lottery ticket numbers are all off by one compared to the winning numbers in "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose" and that the close captioning in "Tunguska" reads "Bambi?" when Mulder finds a cockroach in his gruel (in a nod to a character from "War of the Coprophages").

However, finding good tidbits amid several hundred dumb ones is pretty taxing. The best way to get through it is by doing some nitpicking on the text itself—like when Scully's dog Queequeg is called "Queequag" instead. Then again, no one should be that picky.

—*Annabelle Villanueva*

PICKED APART: Nigglers hover over Mulder and Scully.



Voyage of the Damned

Is Jeri Ryan too late to save *Voyager*?

The Last Word by Mark A. Altman

Just as I was about to pronounce *Star Trek: Voyager* dead, I've detected a pulse again.

The show's dismal third season seemed like the last gasp for the franchise flagship. But the addition of Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan) to the lost-in-space ensemble has quickened heart rates throughout *Trek* fandom and given the show a new lease on life. The fourth season premiere, while not a classic, was the most assured kickoff for a *Voyager* season since the pilot episode.

Yes, the writing was occasionally clunky and Captain Kate got to jump up on her soapbox again. But Seven of Nine juiced the show in an exciting new way—and not just because Jeri Ryan's anatomy is as impressive as her acting. The writers played fast and loose with established Borg lore to jury-rig the character's introduction, but Ryan proved a charismatic figure. Seven of Nine's presence on the ship sparked some much-needed conflict between the overly chummy Janeway and Chakotay. And the episode wisely eschewed technobabble for strong character drama, with the added bonus of some spectacular space-battle scenes courtesy of Foundation Imaging.

Could *Voyager* be going through the same creative renewal that characterized *Deep Space Nine*'s fourth season a year ago? I hope so. But since the episodes following the premiere returned the show to its more hackneyed norm, it remains to be seen if the *Voyager* creative team can get this ship to fly.

> "Seven of Nine juiced the show in an exciting new way—and not just because Jeri Ryan's anatomy is as impressive as her acting."

As for *DS9*, the series has never been better. Despite Ira Behr's self-deprecating comments in *CINESCAPE* ("Married... With Klingons," November/ December) that the "nine people who watch it love it," *DS9* is the true crown jewel of the *Trek* franchise these days. Although it hasn't done much to goose interest in *Star Trek* in general and its merchandise is about as hot as *Howard the Duck* action figures, its surprising stories and strong character development create real magic. Whether it's the epic conflict of an episode like "In Inferno's Light" or the intimate character drama of "In the Cards" or "Dr. Bashir, I Presume," *DS9* not only ranks among the best *Star Trek* incarnations ever, it also favorably compares to the best television dramas.

Perhaps because *DS9* is more sophisticated than *Voyager* and most other sci-fi fare on TV, the program hasn't found a broad audience. As a result, there is a very real possibility that this will be its final season. Hopefully Paramount won't make the mistake it made with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and cancel it too soon in favor of a new, inferior spin-off. The studio should consider that *DS9*, which has always been more character-oriented than plot driven, has the potential to do something no *Trek* series has done before (and *Voyager* is simply incapable of doing)—follow the *M*A*S*H* route and introduce new faces into the ensemble as the old cast moves on.

By retaining its distinctive milieu while shaking up the stories with new cast members and their personal dilemmas, *DS9* can remain fresh and entertaining. After six seasons, most of the primary characters have been explored as much as they can be; it's time for some new crew members. Even with Seven of Nine's yeoman's work, *Voyager*, the reputed star of the *Trek* franchise, remains a rickety contraption, while the underappreciated *DS9* only gets better with age. If only one of the two *Trek* shows is to survive, let it be the *real* successor to the original series. ◆

MARK A. ALTMAN's new book, Trek Navigator *(written with senior editor Edward Gross), will be available at bookstores this month.*

Based on the Warner Bros. television series created by J. Michael Straczynski.

BABYLON 5™

FOR FOUR YEARS, IT'S BEEN ESSENTIAL VIEWING. NOW, IT'S ALSO REQUIRED READING!

FROM THE TV SCREEN...

On sale now

BABYLON 5: IN THE BEGINNING
Peter David

The war between Earth and the advanced Minbari race nearly spelled the extinction of Humankind. But, instead, it led to the creation of the Babylon 5 space station. The stunning novelization of the first full-length *Babylon 5* TV movie—by a *New York Times*–bestselling author, based on the screenplay by series creator J. Michael Straczynski.

A Del Rey Paperback
0-345-42452-2/$5.99/$6.99 in Canada

On sale in February

BABYLON 5: SIGNS AND PORTENTS
Jane Killick

The first in a series of comprehensive guides to each season's episodes! Featuring a foreword by actor Michael O'Hare (Commander Sinclair), two introductory essays—"Getting *Babylon 5* into Orbit" and "*Babylon 5*'s First Season"—and complete synopses of all twenty-two first-season episodes, from "The Gathering" to "Chrysalis," with an in-depth analysis of each.

A Del Rey Trade Paperback
0-345-42447-6/$11.00/$14.95 in Canada

TO BEHIND THE SCENES...

On sale now

CREATING BABYLON 5
David Bassom

The ultimate inside look at the hottest outer-space drama on television—including interviews with staff and stars, page after page of fabulous photos, EXCLUSIVE episode listings for all four seasons, and much more!

A Del Rey Trade Paperback
0-345-41452-7/$18.00/$25.00 in Canada

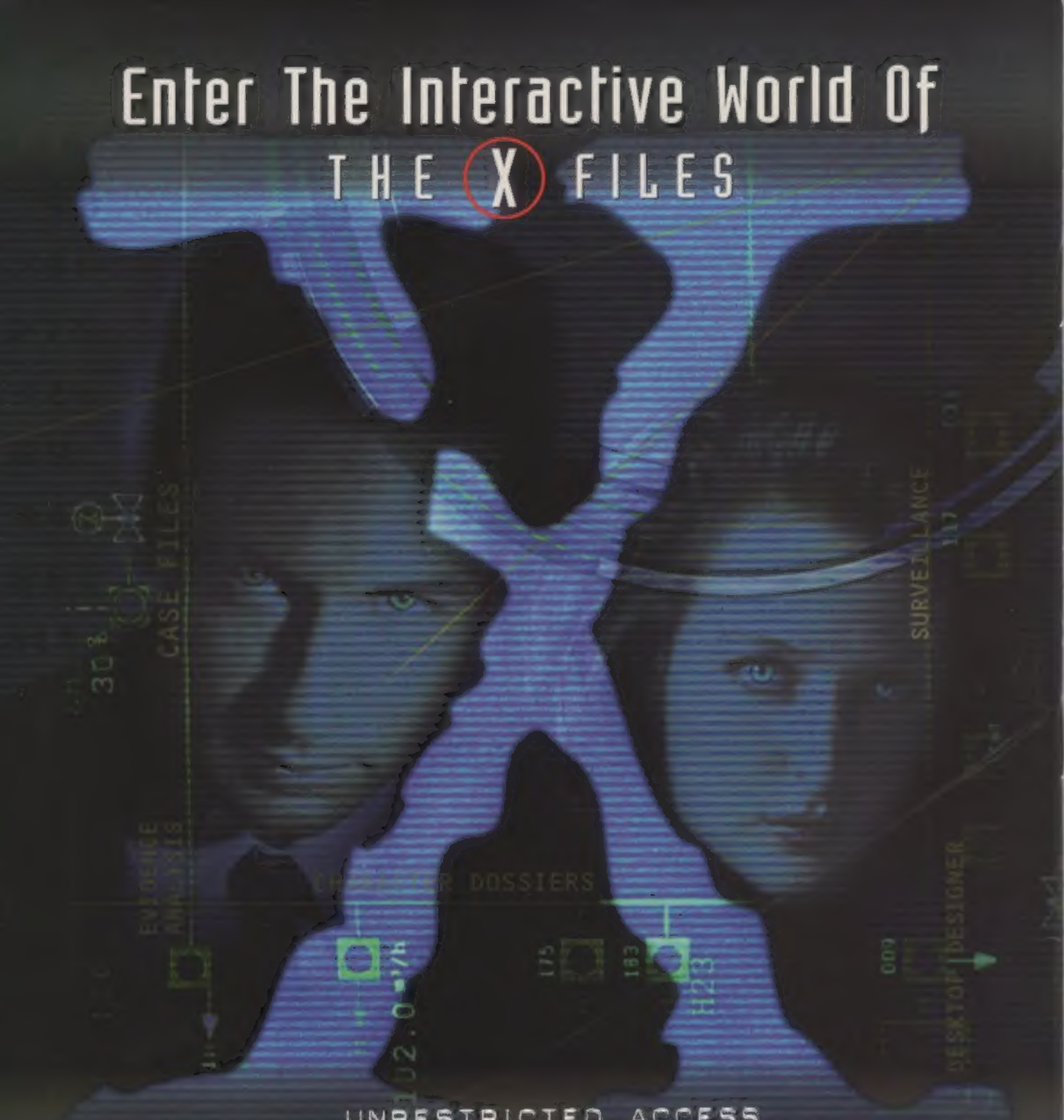
Coming in April
BABYLON 5: The Coming of Shadows

BABYLON 5 TM & © 1998 Warner Bros.

DEL REY
Stories That Define Imagination
A Division of The Ballantine Publishing Group

Free book previews | Author interviews | Games | Exclusive items
http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/
Contests | Inside information | Special offers | And much more

Enter The Interactive World Of THE X FILES



UNRESTRICTED ACCESS

IT WILL CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THE X-FILES.

You've hacked into a highly classified secret government website giving you unrestricted access to The X-Files.™ Browse through case files, character dossiers, evidence records and other top secret materials. Tap into live video and audio surveillance.

At long last, "Unrestricted Access" has been granted to X-Files™ fans everywhere.

Windows® '95 CD-ROM

TEEN T ESRB

FOX INTERACTIVE

THE X-FILES™ and © 1997 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All Rights Reserved. "Twentieth Century Fox," "Fox," and "The X-Files" and their associated logos are the property of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All Rights Reserved.